


AUTHORITY, FREEDOM, AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

BRUCE KENNETH WOOD





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AUTHORITY, FREEDOM, AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

A Study of the Problem of Authority and
Freedom in the Protestant Churches
Today and the Implications for
the Christian Education of
Adolescents and Adults

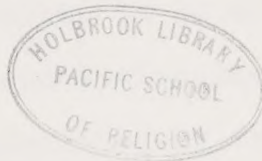
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THESIS

Submitted to the Department of Religious Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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THEOLOGY

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PROLOGUE

"By what authority?" is a question with eternal relevance in matters of religion and religious institutions. Yet any discussion of a claim concerning authority in religion implies some freedom of man and at the same time involves an appeal to some person, fact, or experience as a more basic authority. This study in the philosophy of religious education is first an attempt to ascertain the attitudes toward authority and freedom in the Protestant churches today, to consider the nature, functions, and limits of both authority and freedom in religion, and to survey and evaluate the authorities appealed to in current Protestant thinking.

The survey and evaluation of the authorities appealed to and the great divergence of thought concerning them leads to the thesis that, although the ultimate authority is God, the practical functioning authority for an individual is his total experience, which includes experience of the experiences and thinking of other people past and present. In the light of this thesis, the problems of Christian education for adolescents and adults are discussed and principles and methods suggested which will help provide the practical opportunity for Christian education which will challenge and meet the needs of adolescents and adults in the modern world.

A study of the question of authority and freedom in religion and the implications for religious education could be approached in various ways. The initial approach in this study is inductive. The various claims regarding religious authority and freedom are presented and the implications indicated. The existence of the divergent claims concerning each claimed authority confronts us with the necessity of appealing to some other authority as the criterion. It is seen that, under God, the individual is his own authority in religion, although not without responsibility, and not in isolation from knowledge of the experience and thinking of other people. Following the statement of this thesis, the study is deductive and tries to suggest practical teaching goals, attitudes, and methods indicated by the thesis.

Since the question of authority and freedom in religion is basic to all religious belief and action, the problem is as large as religion itself. Every speech or writing on the subject of religion implies some view of the place and function of authority in religion. Therefore, it is not to be expected that this study will be completely exhaustive or definitive. However, this study is an attempt to present a responsible essay on the problem of authority and freedom in the Protestant Churches today and the issues and requirements for Christian education which will meet the needs of our adolescents, college students, and adults. The

concern of this study with these age groups does not suggest that the problem does not exist in the Christian education of children, but the older age groups have been selected for the area of concentration in this study.

The primary interest of the writer in this problem of freedom and authority in religion comes out of his own religious experience and growth, and out of his experience as a student religious worker, professor, and religious counselor in connection with his work for five years as Director of the Montana School of Religion which is affiliated with Montana State University. During this period the writer was called upon repeatedly to supply in neighboring pulpits, sometimes over an extended period. Numerous requests also came to lead Bible study for adults, to lead discussions at denominational student group meetings, and to help with high school youth groups. It has been the writer's experience that a combination of the problems of freedom and authority and of understanding and using the Bible constitute a major problem in communicating the Christian faith in our day, and that the problem is of special importance for the Christian education of adolescents, college and university students, and adults.

Because of the contemporary nature of this study, much periodical literature has been found helpful. Since the problem of freedom and authority is one of the major issues confronting the World Council of Churches, as Christians seek greater understanding and unity, ecumenical

literature has provided excellent resources for this study. Because many of the Protestant churches in America are involved in the ecumenical movement, much of current discussion in ecumenical circles is a part of the contemporary Protestant scene in America. It is toward the needs of the American Protestant churches that this study is primarily oriented.

The views on authority and freedom in religion discussed in this study are considered without particular regard to the group or person holding or advocating a particular view. References to particular individuals and churches are incidental. No attempt has been made to identify the views of each denomination--some are referred to simply because they illustrate the problem. Emphasis is placed upon the meaning and implications of the views held rather than who or what group holds or champions them. This is consistent with some of the suggestions for nonauthoritarian teaching, as will be evident to the reader later.

All Old Testament references and quotations are from The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version, published by Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953, and all New Testament references and quotations are from The New Covenant, commonly called The New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Revised Standard Version, published by Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946. Acknowledgements of special sources are included as references are made to them.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge my debt to the

faculty of the Pacific School of Religion. Study under their guidance has been a great opportunity and adventure. Appreciation is due to Mr. Oscar Purdick of the Charles Holbrook Library for his unusual interest and assistance in many reference and resource details. I also wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Harland E. Hogue for helpful criticisms during the writing of this thesis. And finally, special appreciation is expressed to Dr. Wayne R. Rood for his vital interest in the subject of this thesis, for his counsel and guidance during this study, and for his incisive criticisms and suggestions which have greatly improved the quality of this presentation.

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PART I

THE NATURE AND PROBLEM OF

AUTHORITY AND FREEDOM

IN RELIGION

CHAPTER I

THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

"'There is a new search for authority in the world today and insofar as we are slaves and spokesmen, the minister has the same authority as Christ.' This authority is 'total and unlimited, does not admit others beside it, and you can't be neutral when you've met it.'"¹ Thus Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, asserted before five hundred Protestant theological students at the fourth triennial conference of the Inter-Seminary Movement at Oberlin College last August. His topic was "'Slaves and Spokesmen,' or the authority of the ministry. His thesis was that the minister receives this authority from Christ alone."² But according to Dr. Visser 't Hooft

¹Willem A. Visser 't Hooft, Speech at the Fourth Triennial Conference of the Inter-Seminary Movement, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio, Aug. 27 to Sept. 1, 1957, quoted in Time, LXX (Sept. 9, 1957), 62.

²Carl Roessler, "Report on I.S.M. Triennial Conference," Inter-Sem Interpreter, I (Oct. 1957), 2 (mimeographed). (This little publication carries the subtitle, "A Sounding Board on Ecumenical Issues, for West Coast Seminarians," with Dieter Hessel, Chuck Harper, and Bob Carlson of San Francisco Theological Seminary at San Anselmo, California listed as editors. Mr. Roessler is a student at Pacific Lutheran Seminary in Berkeley, California, and is the West Coast I.S.M. Field Representative.)

"the minister has authority insofar as he participates in the ministry of Christ: a ministry within Christ, not about Christ."³ Further on Mr. Roessler reports Dr. Visser 't Hooft with the additional words: "We know Christ only through the Scriptures."⁴ It seems the minister is the authority, Christ is the authority, and the Scriptures are the authority, in varying degrees, of course.

As we survey contemporary Christian thinking and writing, there is repeated reference to the problem of authority and freedom in religion. It is particularly evident in ecumenical discussion. Almost every conceivable authority is claimed or appealed to by someone. God, Christ, the Bible, the Church, the tradition, the minister, a denomination, the individual, truth, experience, a man's life, a local congregation, the scholar, dogma, reason, and unwritten expectations are all included.

Contemporary Unorthodoxy and Authority

The last week in July, 1955, the Rev. George P. Crist, Jr., then pastor of the United Lutheran Church at Durham, Wisconsin, was tried for heresy before a panel of seven pastors of the United Lutheran Church, Synod of the Northwest. Earlier, an investigating committee had been appointed by the President of the Synod after a layman in the congregation where Pastor

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

Crist served had brought Pastor Crist's beliefs and teachings to the attention of synodical authorities.⁵ The charges against Pastor Crist were that he held, taught, and preached ". . . doctrines in conflict with the Lutheran faith."⁶

The investigating committee charged in part that he

. . . preached and taught "doctrines, opinions, and surmises" in conflict with the synod's constitution . . . that he has abandoned the "fundamental principles of scriptural interpretation"; that he holds the doctrine of the virgin birth to be not significant; that he denies the physical resurrection of Jesus; that he has taught from the pulpit an interpretation different from the Lutheran doctrine of the real presence in the Lord's Supper; that he does not teach or believe in the doctrine of baptismal regeneration; that he denies the "actuality and historicity of the recorded miracles of our Lord in the realm of nature, . . ."⁷

According to the charges, superior authorities to Pastor Crist included the synod's constitution, the synod's interpretation of the "fundamental principles of scriptural interpretation," and the "Lutheran" interpretation of specific doctrinal statements.

Pastor Crist's reply to the news of his conviction on nine of the fourteen counts against him was that ". . . as a Protestant he has the right to believe as he does," and he declared, "'A literal interpretation of Scripture and a

⁵Charles A. Puls, "Lutheran Pastor Ruled 'Heretical'." The Christian Century, LXXII (August 17, 1955), 952.

⁶"Lutheran Heresy," Time, LXVI (August 8, 1955), 62.

⁷Puls, The Christian Century, LXXII (August 17, 1955), 952.

belief in traditional church dogma are not vital to the Christian faith.' . . . 'Dogma should be interpreted flexibly and freely.'"⁸ In essence, he was claiming his right as a Protestant to interpret Scripture and doctrine according to his best understanding. His authority was his own understanding of what his studies and reflections led him in honesty to conclude. The chairman of the examining committee even pleaded with him to make the supreme sacrifice of his ". . . intellectual doubts and differences as a bearer of the Cross and a follower of Christ." But Pastor Crist insisted on continuing to teach his views.⁹ And so the authority of a denomination has been exercised, and a follower of Luther has insisted on his freedom to interpret the Bible according to his own best understanding and to teach his own honest conclusions. Is the minister the authority? Is the denomination the authority? Is the layman the authority?

Ironically, the August, 1955 issue of The Lutheran Quarterly, printed just before or while the trial of Pastor Crist was being held, included an article titled "A Basis for Intellectual Freedom," by George C. Reese, Professor of Religion in Thiel College, Greenville, Pennsylvania. In this article Professor Reese suggests that Lutheran colleges look to their heritage ". . . to undergird their intellectual

⁸Ibid., p. 953.

⁹"Lutheran Heresy," Time, LXVI (August 8, 1955), p. 63.

freedom."¹⁰ He draws four implications for intellectual freedom from the principle of justification by faith. After stating that "the ground of Christian faith is absolute truth," identifying it with God and his revelation of Himself in Christ, and after recognizing that man is considerably ignorant of complete truth, he states that ". . . because he is justified by his faith in the truth, his response of gratitude will lead him to encourage an atmosphere of intellectual liberty in which he and others can seek truth as much as possible."¹¹ Professor Reese recognizes that there is a possible danger that the ambiguity in our statements of truth might suggest skepticism; he accepts the risk and even asserts that the Reformation principle implies that "the man who is led by faith" has the task ". . . to widen his apprehension of the truth by encouraging freedom of opinion and freedom of expression."¹² Although this article is dealing with academic freedom in Lutheran colleges, it might well apply to Lutheran seminaries, but how hollow it surely would have sounded to Pastor Crist to read it along with the announcement of his conviction and suspension.

Writing in The Lutheran Quarterly for August, 1956, on the subject "Heresy and the Lutheran Church," Robert Paul

¹⁰George C. Reese, "A Basis for Intellectual Freedom," The Lutheran Quarterly, VII (August, 1955), 271.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 273.

Roth, Professor of the New Testament in the Southern Seminary, Columbia, South Carolina, claims there is a difference between empirical-fact and faith-fact, and implies that faith has a special way of knowing.¹³ Thus faith-experience would be a special kind of knowing, and would be authoritative. Also, faith-facts ". . . are not subject to change."¹⁴ It would seem to follow that statements of faith-facts aren't subject to change, either, according to Roth's thinking, and, therefore, they are not symbols just to be taken seriously, but must be taken literally.¹⁵ Thus a past statement of faith-fact becomes authoritative and not subject to change in interpretation. And Roth closes his article with a question implying that no one should deny ". . . the Lutheran Church the right to prevent a man to speak for its faith when he preaches and teaches a gospel contrary to that which it has always preached."¹⁶

In reply to Mr. Roth's article, the Rev. Victor K. Wrigley, pastor of Gethsemane Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and one of the two other pastors accused at the same time as Pastor Crist, appeals to the authority of the spirit of a

¹³Paul Robert Roth, "Heresy and the Lutheran Church," The Lutheran Quarterly, VIII (August, 1956), 247.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 248.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 249.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 252.

man's life,¹⁷ and to the authority of Christ.¹⁸ He states that "at no point in the whole sorry 'heresy' proceedings in the Synod of the Northwest was any honest effort made to learn George Crist's spirit, nor to give him open opportunity to 'communicate his spirit.'"¹⁹

The panel of ministers who examined Crist had recommended that he be suspended from the ministry with final disposition of the case to be made by the Synod the following May.²⁰ In theory, then, the Synod would review the case and have the final decision. Thus authority would not be vested in the president of the Synod, nor in the investigating or examining committees, but in the denomination as a whole. Instead of waiting till the regular Synod meeting in May, a special meeting of the Synod was called in January, 1956, to consider the matter. Wrigley writes:

The president of the synod had previously given written assurance that all matters pertaining to the conduct of the investigation and trials would be subject to review at this convention. However, at the convention itself, he made an opening declaration that "theological debate" would not be permitted. When, then, Professor George W. Forell sought to take issue with the procedures that were followed, he was successively shouted down by the delegates, gaveled down by

¹⁷Victor K. Wrigley, "Heresy and Christianity: A Reply to Professor Roth," The Lutheran Quarterly, IX (August, 1957), 272.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 275.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 272.

²⁰Puls, The Christian Century, LXXII (August 17, 1955), 953.

the president, and declared "out of order" for the bulk of his protest.²¹

This suggests that the case had been prejudged and emotionalized so that there was really no opportunity for a fair review of the case. Freedom was so limited there was not even opportunity for free debate on the issues, even when Dr. Forell, a professor in the School of Religion at the State University of Iowa, challenged the procedure.

The Problem and Ecumenical Conferences

But the problem of authority and freedom in Christianity is not limited to the Lutherans. Repeated discussion of the problem is evident in the speeches and statements in the preparatory materials and statements coming out of ecumenical conferences. Dr. Visser 't Hooft's statement before the Inter-Seminary Movement Conference at Oberlin in August, 1957, has already been mentioned.²² A study guide for this conference, prepared by Dr. Ralph Hyslop and others, devotes its first section to "The Authority of the Ministry."²³ Numerous quotations

²¹Wrigley, The Lutheran Quarterly, IX (August, 1957), 274.

²²Above, p. 2.

²³Ralph Hyslop, et al., "A Study Guide: The Nature of the Ministry We Seek," Prepared for the Fourth National Triennial Conference of the Interseminary Movement at Oberlin, Ohio, August 27 to September 1, 1957 (New York: The Interseminary Committee of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 257 Fourth Avenue, N.Y., 1957), pp. 1-4. (Mimeographed.) (Others working with Dr. Hyslop in the preparation of this study guide were: Paul Lehmann, Paul Minear, Justin Vander Kolk, Wesley Stevens, and Richard Heaton. For the use of the study materials for this Inter-Seminary Movement Conference, I am indebted to Miss Joanne Petree, a student at Pacific School of Religion who attended the Conference.)

on the subject are given representing the thinking of Martin Luther, Gustav Aulen, Emil Brunner, Bishop Neill, Father Bulgakov, and Edwin Hatch; statements from the Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches, from the Edinburgh and Lusanne Conferences, and an excerpt from a Statement by the Eastern Orthodox Delegation at the Evanston Assembly were also included, along with a few scriptural references. Added to these quotations and references were searching questions to stimulate thought and discussion on the nature of the ministry, the authority that inheres in it, and the legitimate exercise of what authority the ministry does have.²⁴

The first meeting of the West Coast branch of the Inter-Seminary Movement for the academic year 1957-58 was on the subject "Components of Christian Authority." This meeting was addressed by Professor John Bennett of Union Theological Seminary. Dr. Bennett stated there was no escape from the problem of authority, and that the prevailing authority tends to be that which has a pressure on it. He said the Bible is a book about the Revelation, but that we do not find within the Bible the criterion to judge the Revelation. In answer to questions, he asserted that the location of authority is in the events, that the Church cannot give a once and for all interpretation of them, and that a man must make up his own mind, checking his response with the responses of

²⁴Ibid.

others.²⁵ This clearly leaves the final authority for interpretation with the individual man, while not denying the ultimate authority of God.

The West Coast Inter-Sem Interpreter for December, 1957, carried two articles on the ministry. The Rev. Massey H. Shepherd, Professor of Liturgics at Church Divinity School of the Pacific, writing on "The Ministry in the Protestant Episcopal Church," recognizes that "the ordained Minister must be called of God, 'inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost.'" But the Church tries and examines the man and decides whether he has what the Church considers to be the necessary qualities.²⁶ Therefore, it follows that the Church is the authority which decides whether the man is suitable for a call to the ministry, although a man may feel called of God when the Church thinks he should not be.

In the same issue of the Inter-Sem Interpreter, a senior at Berkeley Baptist Divinity School, Bob Wallace, in his article titled "A Free Church View of the Office of the Ministry," emphasizes ". . . the continued free rule of the Spirit in the life of the Church . . ." and ". . . the necessity of a man's free and personal response to God." He presents the view that ". . . the ministerial office is

²⁵Based on notes taken by the writer who attended this meeting held in the Chapel of the Great Commission at Pacific School of Religion, November 14, 1957.

²⁶Massey H. Shepherd, "The Ministry in the Protestant Episcopal Church," Inter-Sem Interpreter, I (December, 1957), 1, 3. (Mimeographed.)

not of the essence of the church, but exists as the servant of the church." But he also states that ". . . the call is mediated through the congregation."²⁷ Although at first this sounds considerably different from the Episcopal position as expressed by Professor Shepherd, it is actually surprisingly similar when we realize that the congregation, the locus of authority in the free churches, has an authority over whose call to the ministry is accepted as suitable. This is different in organizational pattern, but perhaps not so different in practice.²⁸

At the North American Faith and Order Study Conference in Oberlin, Ohio, in September, 1957, the question of authority and freedom was very much in evidence. In the opening address, Bishop Angus Dun said: "For all of us in different ways the Holy Scriptures are normative for our discipleship and for the life of our separate churches."²⁹ Dr. Robert L.

²⁷Bob Wallace, "A Free Church View of the Office of the Ministry," Inter-Sem Interpreter, I (Dec., 1957), pp. 1, 3. (Mimeographed.)

²⁸The question might be raised whether the element of representative democracy in the Protestant Episcopal Church is essentially different from the democracy of a free church. It is interesting to note that in a free church, such as a Baptist, a Congregational Christian, a Presbyterian, or a Christian Church, the local congregation actually employs the minister, whether it be done by the Session, the council, or a committee of the local church, or actual first-hand congregational vote. But in the Protestant Episcopal Church, the local church, acting through its vestry, actually employs the minister.

²⁹Angus Dun, Address at the Opening Plenary Session of the North American Faith and Order Study Conference, Oberlin, Ohio, Sept., 1957, p. 1. (Mimeographed.) (For the use of the study materials, speeches, and statements connected with this Conference, I am indebted to Dr. Georgia Harkness and to The United States Conference for the World Council of Churches, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y.)

Calhoun, in a speech at the same Conference, also affirms that ". . . the whole Bible, and not some fraction of it-- is indispensable as guide to Christian faith."³⁰ Dr. Albert C. Outler, in a speech at the same Oberlin Conference, recognizes that each denomination claims to trace its tradition back to the beginning of the Church but states in no uncertain terms: "Historical inquiry simply cannot discover such a single, unaltered tradition in the historical experience of the Christian community."³¹ This certainly calls in question the claim to unique authority of any one tradition. As was to be expected, this was not satisfactory to the Greek Orthodox representatives. The delegates from the Greek Orthodox Church in the U. S. A. were duly "appointed by His Eminence, Archbishop Michael, . . ." and led by Bishop Athenagoras Kokkinakis as chairman.³² In a prepared statement, the delegates of the Greek Orthodox Church assert that the unity of the Church ". . . is embodied in the Orthodox Church, which kept . . . both the integrity of the Apostolic Faith

³⁰Robert L. Calhoun, "Christ and the Church," An Address at the North American Faith and Order Study Conference, Oberlin, Ohio, September, 1957, p. 4. (Mimeographed.)

³¹Albert C. Outler, "Our Common History as Christians," An Address at the North American Faith and Order Study Conference, Oberlin, Ohio, September, 1957, p. 2. (Mimeographed.)

³²Athenagoras Kokkinakis, et al., "Christian Unity as Viewed by the Eastern Orthodox Church," Statement of the Representatives of the Greek Orthodox Church in the U. S. A. at the North American Faith and Order Study Conference, Oberlin, Ohio, Sept., 1957, p. 1. (Mimeographed.)

and the integrity of the Apostolic Order."³³ Theirs is the historic Church, so the claim goes, and unity cannot be found outside it. ". . . The Orthodox Church teaches that she . . . is the Una Sancta and that all Christian groups outside the Orthodox Church can recover their unity only by entering into the bosom of that Church which preserved its identity with early Christianity."³⁴ This means further that "any agreement on faith must rest on the authority of the enactments of the seven Ecumenical Councils which represent the mind of the one undivided Church of antiquity and the subsequent tradition as safeguarded in the life of the Orthodox Church."³⁵ This Eastern Orthodox Statement further claims that the Eastern Orthodox Church ". . . maintains the necessary balance between freedom and authority and thus avoids the extremes of absolutism and individualism both of which have done violence to Christian unity."³⁶ These are straightforward and unmistakable words which really claim the Eastern Orthodox Church as the authority and last court of appeal on all matters relating to the Christian faith and history where dogma and the interpretation of the Bible are concerned, for this is to them the will of God.³⁷

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., p. 2.

³⁵Ibid., p. 3.

³⁶Ibid., p. 2.

³⁷Ibid., p. 1.

The Report of Division II of this Faith and Order Study Conference states that "authority exercised in and by the Church proceeds from the sovereign God who has made Christ the Head of the Church and Lord of all."³⁸ This Report recognizes the place of the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit in the functioning of the ultimate authority of God. "Freedom in the Church . . ." is conceived to be ". . . the responsible right of the people of God to seek and to do the will of Christ under the leading of the Holy Spirit."³⁹ These statements imply a hierarchy of authorities with God as the ultimate authority and Christ anointed Head of the Church. The Report speaks of "authority in church government . . ." as existing ". . . for the orderly functioning of any group, whether in the congregation or a denomination."⁴⁰ But there is a warning: this authority ". . . must be both directed and limited by the purpose of bringing to all Christians the freedom that is in Christ. Separated from this objective, it becomes a form of dominance which is at variance with the very nature of the Christian koinonia."⁴¹ This implies limitation upon any earthly institution or authority, and freedom for

³⁸World Council of Churches, "Report of Division II of the North American Faith and Order Study Conference," Oberlin, Ohio, September, 1957, p. 1. (Mimeographed.)

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

man only to do the will of God.

The influence on freedom of Christian thought and teaching of various attitudes on order in the Church is pointed up by a report prepared by the Commission on Faith and Order of the Canadian Council of Churches for the North American Faith and Order Study Conference. The statement reads in part:

The more definitely the concept of apostolic authority as at least partially continued by way of "apostolic succession" is excluded, and the more sharply exclusive are the claims made for the canonical Scriptures as the repository of apostolic tradition and authority, the less room there will be for the notion of authoritative dogmatic teaching and the more sweeping will be the claims made for the right and duty to work for the constant reformation of the Church by the Word of God. . . . The more comprehensive the claims made for the apostolic succession, and the stronger the sense of visible unity and continuity as centered in the episcopally ordered Ministry, the less room there will be for the exercise of private judgment in the interpretation of apostolic tradition and the more restricted will be the possibilities of radical "reformation."⁴²

Thus the nature of Christian education would depend considerably upon the attitudes toward authority and apostolic succession.

The Problem in Ecumenical Literature

As might be expected, The Ecumenical Review carries many articles which bear on the problem of freedom and

⁴²The Canadian Council of Churches, "Order and Organization," Report Submitted to the North American Study Conference on Faith and Order, 1957; prepared by the Commission on Faith and Order of the Canadian Council of Churches at the request of the Committee on Arrangements for the Oberlin Conference (Toronto, Canada: May, 1957), p. 13. (Mimeographed.)

authority in the Protestant Churches. Repeatedly in these articles, the Bible is appealed to and referred to as authoritative. A statement in the Report of the Third World Conference on Faith and Order held at Lund, Sweden, in 1952 states in part:

We have sought to declare in these brief paragraphs the inseparable relation between Christ and his Church. To these convictions about the Church we are led by our faith in Jesus Christ and by our shared acceptance of the authority of the Holy Scriptures.⁴³

The Report of the Advisory Commission on the Main Theme of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches states:

"The good news of hope which we proclaim comes to us through the Holy Scriptures. It is the gift of God Himself and rests upon His deeds in the world and His promises for mankind."⁴⁴

Dr. Ralph Hyslop writes that the responses to the First Report of the Commission on the Main Theme for the Evanston Conference largely explain why ". . . the Commission . . . in the Second Report . . . provided specific Scriptural citations as the basis for what they wished to say about the Christian hope."⁴⁵ This is clear testimony to the authoritative place

⁴³The World Council of Churches, "Christ and His Church," The Ecumenical Review, V (October, 1952), 68. (This statement is from the second chapter of the report of the Third World Conference on Faith and Order at Lund, Sweden in 1952.)

⁴⁴The World Council of Churches, "Report of the Advisory Commission on the Main Theme of the Second Assembly, Christ--the Hope of the World," The Ecumenical Review, VI (July, 1954), 433.

⁴⁵Ralph Douglas Hyslop, "Responses to the Second Report on the Main Theme," The Ecumenical Review, VI (October, 1953), 71.

of the Bible in the Protestant Churches. A. M. Chirgwin, Research Secretary of the United Bible Societies comments that "there is everywhere a new disposition to 'search the Scriptures,'" and suggests that "it is worth considering whether a new approach to unity, with the Bible as the starting point, may not be God's call to His people today."⁴⁶

On the importance of the Bible, Wolfgang Schweitzer, at the time a secretary in the Study Department of the World Council of Churches, even asserted that

. . . we cannot evade the problem of the Bible. . . . If the occasional utterances and declarations of the World Council of Churches are to be recognized as the witness of Christendom in our day, it must be possible to demonstrate that what is set forth is spoken in obedience to the living Lord of the Church. The most important, indeed many of us would say the only, touchstone is the Bible.⁴⁷

Edmund Schlink, Professor of Systematic Theology at Heidelberg University, makes a similar emphasis by saying that the Word of God must be the norm and that we must recognize it if we want to come to understand the Church in other confessions.⁴⁸

⁴⁶A. M. Chirgwin, "Have the Bible and Its Circulation Any Significance for the Ecumenical Movement?" The Ecumenical Review, VI (April, 1954), 298.

⁴⁷Wolfgang Schweitzer, "The Bible and the Church's Message to the World," The Ecumenical Review, II (Winter, 1950), 123-24.

⁴⁸Edmund Schlink, "The Church and the Churches," The Ecumenical Review, I (Winter, 1949), 156-57.

But the problem is not simply settled by appealing to the Bible as the norm. Miss Suzanne de Dietrich, Lecturer at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland, poses another issue when she points out that the interpretation of the Bible is a most controversial subject in the ecumenical movement, and writes that ". . . as soon as we start interpreting the witness of apostles and prophets, we differ."⁴⁹ However, she is hopeful, and states that "only the Living God speaking through the Bible can unite us."⁵⁰ Certainly the Bible is a major authority and much attention will be given later to the problem which different approaches and interpretations create for us.⁵¹

Mr. A. G. Hebert, an Anglican who is a member of the Faith and Order Commission on Intercommunion, probes deeper and asks basic questions on how necessary or important authority is. He appreciates how the problem looks from the various sides. He asks ". . . how necessary is it that the Church should present its message as authoritative, and that this involves authoritative forms of doctrinal teaching?"⁵²

⁴⁹Suzanne de Dietrich, "The Bible, a Force for Unity," The Ecumenical Review, I (Summer, 1949), 411.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Below, pp. 120-31, 392-407.

⁵²A. G. Hebert, "Issues on the Church," The Ecumenical Review, IV (April, 1952), 240.

He asks what checks are needed to prevent liberty of the pulpit from becoming license. He recognizes the tendency to a "flight from freedom" and its responsibilities on the part of some and the extremes to which it often leads. He also calls attention to the difference between ". . . freedom from outward restrictions . . . and the inner freedom of the liberated will . . ." ⁵³ Hebert raises these questions because he thinks that the Faith and Order report on the Church prepared for the Third World Conference on Faith and Order at Lund, Sweden in 1952 does not ". . . tackle resolutely the central points of difficulty . . ." and the first one he calls attention to is the "problem of authority." ⁵⁴ But the Lund Conference may have done better than the report just referred to. At least the question of ". . . the status and influence of Tradition and various traditions in the churches" was discussed. A study group of theologians has been set up to seek the central Tradition. The convener of this study group, Professor K. E. Skydsgaard, who is Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Copenhagen, asks the following very pertinent questions:

Does tradition in all cases mean a secondary accretion to the apostolic proclamation (kerygma)? What authority does extra-biblical Tradition carry? How have our faith and practice been fashioned by traditions without our conscious recognition of the process? Here is a

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

field of study--biblical, theological, and historical--which offers much promise for the clarification of divisive factors at work among the churches today.⁵⁵

These are basic questions in the area of what is authoritative and, therefore, the authority. It is noticeable also that the appeal is really back to the sources. In other words, the most dependable authority is assumed to be discernible by careful research and inquiry. Dr. Albert C. Outler, Professor of Theology at Southern Methodist University, also calls attention to the need of this kind of study when he says that "it is notorious that the traditional patterns of church history and the history of doctrine have been more apologetic and partisan than synoptic and ecumenical."⁵⁶ He appeals to a study of history and a reassessment of ". . . the role and meaning of doctrine, worship, and Christian service in the common life of the churches . . ." and says that "What we need is an ecumenical history of the experience of the Christian community from its beginnings till now . . ."⁵⁷ This constitutes an appeal to the facts of history and also to experience which underlies all interpretation of facts. But he goes further when he says, not just that we need an historical answer to various questions concerning expression and transmission of the Gospel over the centuries, but that "we need an historically honest answer . . ."⁵⁸ Thus, he

⁵⁵K. E. Skydsgaard, "Faith and Order--Our Oneness in Christ and Our Disunity as Churches," The Ecumenical Review VI (October, 1953), 13.

⁵⁶Albert C. Outler, "A Way Forward from Lund," The Ecumenical Review, V (October, 1952), 60.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 61-62.

⁵⁸Ibid.

recognizes the need for the kind of study in which the learner seeks to know the whole story, rather than particular details that might support a preconceived opinion, especially if opposing evidence is not known. This kind of appeal implies that an historian in his own study, and from his own perspective, has a degree of authority over what details he thinks are authoritative and thus worthy of being credited with authority. The authority of the historian suggests the question of the authority of scholarly opinion over those who are not scholars in that particular area. This problem will be considered in some detail in the section dealing with the question of evidence and the basis of decision.⁵⁹

The question of freedom has also been raised in a special way in the ecumenical movement. This issue comes to the fore because of the concern of the Eastern Orthodox people. The World Council of Churches' provisional statement on the issue in 1956 recognizes that the issues in this area "... have existed within the ecumenical movement from its very beginning," and states that "in 1920 the well-known Encyclical of the ecumenical Patriarchate with its strong plea for cooperation among the churches asked for a definite cessation of Proselytising activities."⁶⁰ It is interesting

⁵⁹Below, pp. 217-19.

⁶⁰The World Council of Churches, "Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty in the Setting of the World Council of Churches," A Provisional Report submitted to the member churches for their consideration, The Ecumenical Review, IX (Oct., 1956), 48-49.

that the World Council of Churches' provisional statement on the subject starts with a reference to "the article on religious liberty in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights . . ." as ". . . a useful starting point."⁶¹ The statement then spells out a conception of religious liberty which recognizes the freedom of a person who is no longer subject to his parents to choose his own religious commitment and to change his allegiance to another church from that of his parents or of his first commitment.

The problem of authority and freedom is also considered in The Student World, where the problem of the Bible comes to the fore. It seems that the Bible is perennially a subject of controversy. Visser 't Hooft remarks that ". . . in the history of the Church and in the relations between churches of different kinds, the Bible has, on the whole, been a divisive factor."⁶² A. G. Hebert asks which came first, the Church or the Bible, and points out that the Bible has come through the Church, yet recalls the Church to its task and the Word of God.⁶³ For the Eastern Orthodox, although "the Scriptures are entrusted to the whole Church . . . the authoritative

⁶¹Ibid., p. 52.

⁶²W. A. Visser 't Hooft, "The Bible in an Ecumenical Setting," The Student World, XLIX (First Quarter, 1956), 45.

⁶³A. G. Hebert, "Which Comes First, the Church or the Bible?" The Student World, XLII (First Quarter, 1949), 112, 116.

teaching rests with the Bishops."⁶⁴ Paul Evdokimoff states the Eastern Orthodox position in a more extreme form by saying that dogmatic truth is supreme and that anything that is opposed to it "must be set aside."⁶⁵ Thus it is clear in these views that the Bible is considered an authority in a limited sense by the Eastern Orthodox. Authority for interpretation rests in the bishops, but the bishops of today are bound by what has already been declared dogmatic truth by previous bishops. If there can be no appeal beyond or against tradition, then tradition is the authority.

Hans Inwand expresses a very extreme position when he states that a dogmatic statement claims to contain ". . . the authority of Christ Himself."⁶⁶ This dogmatic statement ". . . is not addressed to our freedom," but it asks us ". . . to surrender our freedom . . ."⁶⁷ Thus Christ is considered the authority. Yet Inwand continues by stating that "we bind ourselves through faith, and we free ourselves through thought."⁶⁸ It is hard to know what this

⁶⁴Helle Georgiadis, "The Bible and the Church," The Student World, XLIX (First Quarter, 1956), 67. (This article was one of a panel of three addresses, followed by discussion, given at the Bible Study Conference, held at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, Sept., 2-12, 1955.)

⁶⁵Paul Evdokimoff, "An Eastern Orthodox Bible Study," The Student World, XLII (Second Quarter, 1949), 154.

⁶⁶Hans Inwand, "Dogmatics and Ecumenicity," The Student World, XLIII (Fourth Quarter, 1950), 330.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 331.

⁶⁸Ibid.

last could mean except perhaps that with hindsight our being bound is thought to be the condition of what freedom we have. But it is suggestive to say that thought has a real place in the process, and this may suggest more freedom resting in the use of thought than Inwand allows.

George Florovsky states his own position for the authority of the Church in very uncompromising terms,⁶⁹ and claims that ". . . the whole and the full truth has been already given and entrusted to the Church."⁷⁰ But he goes on to say that ". . . on the whole, the deposit was faithfully kept . . ." and that "revision and re-statement is always possible, sometimes imperative."⁷¹ These statements imply an unadmitted freedom; by implying that in at least a few instances the deposit was not fully kept and stating that "revision and re-statement is always possible, sometimes imperative," Florovsky implies the opening of the door for re-examination of the faith in an attempt to determine what was fully kept and what was not. Although he asserts the Church's authority, this suggests an authority to which we can appeal to ascertain whether the Church has used her authority well. Thus the Church at least would not be an authority which could not reverse herself, and the implication really is that some kind of information is available

⁶⁹ George Florovsky, "Confessional Loyalty in the Ecumenical Movement," The Student World, XLIII (First Quarter, 1950), 69.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 70.

⁷¹Ibid.

by which men can make a responsible decision in the case. Florovsky also expresses his belief that ". . . the truth of God carries conviction," and appeals to evidence in support of his position.⁷² It follows then that Florovsky has faith that men can correctly evaluate evidence, and that the truth of God will be determinative in men's decision. Thus the decision concerning what is authoritative and what is accepted as the real authority is actually made by men.

The Problem in Other Current Writing

This problem of authority and freedom is also recognized in some other current writing. In their recent study of theological education, Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson call attention to the authoritative role played by denominational traditions in confessionally oriented theological schools. They state: ". . . we . . . find in many confessionally oriented schools . . . that acceptance of the tradition has created a climate in which the stimulus of tension with other viewpoints is absent."⁷³ In this way the particular tradition serves as the authority and limits freedom of thought, sometimes just by not calling attention to opposing views, what they say, and why. Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson then proceed to argue the case for the

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel Day Williams, and James M. Gustafson, The Advancement of Theological Education (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1957), p. 136.

presentation of various points of view in theological study.⁷⁴ They also call attention to the authority of unwritten expectations, both liberal and conservative, which are not formal requirements but which become primary and practical authorities in life.⁷⁵ These authorities suggest limits upon freedom which may be natural to the nature of in-groups and the need for recognition and status.

In his recent book, The Early Church and the Coming Great Church, Professor John Knox of Union Theological Seminary refers to the authority of Scripture as ". . . the authority of the memory and the Spirit of Christ as these are expressed and embodied in the early church . . ."⁷⁶ But Knox recognizes this does not answer the question of the authority of the Bible and asks:

Do elements of faith and practice need to be universal among the primitive churches in order to have authority? If not, how are we to distinguish the normative elements? Do elements emerging only in the latter part of the early period have the same authority as elements present in the very beginning? Does the authority belong only to what can properly be called primitive Christianity--by which phrase we mean, I suppose, the Christianity that produced the New Testament documents--or do certain later developments also possess it in some degree?⁷⁷

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 136-37.

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 195-97.

⁷⁶John Knox, The Early Church and the Coming Great Church (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), p. 132.

⁷⁷Ibid.

These questions are basic and even to approach them suggests man has to use the best evidence and thinking possible to come to a satisfactory conclusion. This in turn throws tremendous responsibility back upon the individual man. He has to decide what he will accept as his authority.

Writing over fifty years ago Auguste Sabatier wrote in the preface to his classic work, Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit, the following:

It may perhaps be said: Granted that with the method of authority theology cannot maintain its dignity as a true science; is it yet certain that it can survive without this method?

Thus, in the eyes of the majority, the problem of authority becomes a question of life or death for theology, and even for religion.⁷⁸

The problem is still with us, and is perhaps more urgent than before because of our efforts to understand each other and to find common ground in the ecumenical movement.

Dr. W. Earl Biddle of Philadelphia State Hospital also refers to the problem in his work titled Integration of Religion and Psychiatry. He says in part:

Because of the abuses of authority its positive value has been questioned. Its function has been attacked and weakened. The source of authority has been debated, and many questions have arisen. Who has the right to determine what is good and what is bad? Who can say with finality what ought and what ought not to be done? Does anyone have the right

⁷⁸Auguste Sabatier, Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit, trans. Louise Seymour (New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1904), p. xvii.

to impose restrictions upon anyone else without that person's consent? In this great debate the very foundations of society are at stake.⁷⁹

The problem also has other ramifications. In her recent book, Free to Grow, Miss Blanche Carrier calls attention to the fact that ". . . since 1926 there has been a 32.8 per cent gain in membership in churches," but that ". . . the percentage of increase in fundamentalist churches has been twice as high as that in the so-called liberal churches."⁸⁰ Why? Is it partly due to the authoritative pronouncements of the fundamentalists? Is it partly due to insecurity in other areas which conditions people to accept a claimed authority which seems genuine and then to close their minds? Is it partly due to the difficulty of stating the positive liberal position with clarity and power? Is it partly because the liberals have failed to teach in a way which leads people into first-hand experience of the issues involved before giving them possible conclusions? Can religion be authoritative for a person, yet not authoritarian? Can we teach without being dogmatic? Should we? To these questions and many others this study is addressed in the hope of seeing and understanding the problem at its deeper levels and arriving at some working principles.

⁷⁹W. Earl Biddle, Integration of Religion and Psychiatry (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 133. (This statement has relevance to the field of religion but it also points to the whole problem in our culture which, however, is outside the scope of this study.)

⁸⁰Blanche Carrier, Free to Grow (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1951), p. 57.

In this survey of contemporary Christian attitudes and statements on authority and freedom in the Protestant churches, almost every conceivable authority is appealed to or claimed by someone. Authorities mentioned include God, Christ, the Bible, the Church, the tradition, the minister, a denomination, the individual, truth, experience, a man's life, a local congregation, the scholar, dogma, reason, and unwritten expectations. In the sections which follow, we shall consider first the nature of authority and of freedom and the dangers in the extremes of each. We shall review the various authorities which are suggested as an answer to the problem, and shall consider the basis upon which any authority or claim is accepted or rejected. Then we shall consider the problems which the issue of authority and freedom in the Protestant churches poses for the Christian education of youth and adults in the Protestant churches in America. Finally, suggestions will be made indicating principles and procedures for effective Christian education which will meet the needs of our people and the challenges that are before us.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE AND PROBLEM OF AUTHORITY IN RELIGION

If we should ask a Christian what is the ultimate authority in life, he might well reply that it is God and His will. With this statement it would be hard to take issue except to point out that while on the surface it sounds all right, actually it is only a starting point and, if taken at face value, is a tragic oversimplification. It is asserted by H. Cunliffe-Jones, a professor at Yorkshire United Independent College, Bradford, England, that "man cannot be his own authority," only God can.¹ But this does not solve the problem of choosing the right authority, the authority of God. It is asserted that God has made Himself known in His revelation,² but this does not indicate whose claim to have received a revelation or to have made the correct interpretation of a revelation is to be accepted. R. H. Strachan, Emeritus Professor of New Testament Language and Literature, Westminster College, Cambridge, points out

¹H. Cunliffe-Jones, "Ananias and Sapphira," The Congregational Quarterly, XXVII (April, 1949), 116.

²H. Cunliffe-Jones, The Authority of the Biblical Revelation (London: James Clarke & Co., LTD., 1945), pp. 15-16. (An American Edition of this work was published in 1948 by Pilgrim Press, Boston.)

in The Authority of Christian Experience that "a religion of authority assumes that God must reveal Himself to us in a way which admits of no possible mistake" ³ This implies that man has not been left to make his own decision in such matters, and that the revelation is infallible so that anyone who seeks God with an open mind will find Him. The fallacy of such a position is dramatized by the claims of Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, each of which claims it is the only true church. We must seek something authoritative beyond a claim for authority to evaluate the validity of a claim for authority.

Confronted with rival and contradictory claims for authority in religion, we cannot ignore the problem of freedom and authority in religion. Arthur W. Munk, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Albion College, writing in The Journal of Bible and Religion, surveys the problem and recognizes the importance of the issue. He thinks Roman Catholicism ". . . suffers from excess authority . . . " while ". . . liberal Protestantism's weakness is lack of authority." ⁴ Furthermore, Munk cautions that those who are concerned for freedom ". . . must not allow confusion to be the last word." ⁵ He suggests that, if confusion is allowed,

³R. H. Strachan, The Authority of Christian Experience, A Study in the Basis of Religious Authority (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1931), p. 16.

⁴Arthur W. Munk, "The Basis of Authority in Religion," The Journal of Bible and Religion, XX (Oct., 1952), 255.

⁵Ibid.

" . . . disintegration will be the result followed by new forms of authoritarianism."⁶ In Munk's opinion, this could happen because religion is " . . . so vitally related to the destiny of men and of nations . . ."⁷ Therefore, we must " . . . again consider the basis of authority with the hope of finding some working solution."⁸ Let us then proceed to a consideration of the nature of authority.

The Nature of Authority

Any idea, institution, person, or experience which is determinative for our thoughts and actions has authority for us. The first authority a person feels is his own basic need--need for the physical necessities of life, and closely related to this, the need for emotional security. There is some evidence which suggests that a minimum feeling of emotional or "affectional" security is a prerequisite of normal physical life.⁹ A child also soon experiences the

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Blanche Carrier refers to a study by Dr. Margaret Ribble which indicated " . . . that marasmus, a disease that causes the death of one-half of the babies who die in their first year, develops because the baby lacks an experience of warm accepting love." Blanche Carrier, Free to Grow, p. 12, citing Margaret Ribble, The Rights of Infants (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), Chap. I. See also Smiley Blanton, Love or Perish (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), pp. 39-40, and his reference to the experience in a foundling home in South America where the patient load per nurse was too great to allow the nurses to play with the children, with the result that, of ninety-seven babies, "twenty-seven . . . died

authority of his parents which is brought to bear upon him to affect his actions. As the child grows older he experiences the claims of other authorities of group and society which would receive his acceptance. Major among these claims are the claims of religion.

The claim of religious authority by its nature tends to be a claim to total authority over life, for religion is essentially an interpretation of the meaning and purpose of life, along with the consequent implied ethics. There is no greater question than what a person should do with the life he did not request and yet which comes with inherent requirements and responsibilities. The whole history of man testifies to the fact that he cannot leave this question alone--it is too important. Perhaps this is why, as Dr. Thouless points out, religious convictions tend to be held with a definiteness and an emotional load not directly related to the supporting evidence.¹⁰

in their first year of life. Seven more died in the second year. Another twenty-one who remained in the institution managed to survive, but they were so altered by the experience that they had to be classified as hopeless neurotics, or worse. Lack of normal love had laid waste the lives, in all, of more than half the original group of infants." There is also the implication that some of the original ninety-seven did not remain in the institution, which raises the question whether the figure might have been even higher for those who either died or became hopelessly neurotic if all had remained in the institution.

¹⁰Robert H. Thouless, Authority and Freedom, Some Psychological Problems of Religious Belief (Greenwich, Connecticut: The Seabury Press, 1954), p. 52. (The Halsean Lectures delivered at the University of Cambridge in 1932 constitute this book.)

It is hard to deal with the concept of authority without being concrete, for authority is basically active and functional. Authority involves a relationship of persons, or a person to ideas and institutions. According to the Christian faith, the highest relationship of man is to God. God being creator, sustainer, and judge, His will has the ultimate claim upon our lives. If we could know His complete will with certainty, the problem would be tremendously simplified. But since there is great disagreement both as to the will of God and what authority, if any, He has delegated to men on earth, we must consider other phases of the nature of authority.

Sabatier asserts that ". . . authority is never other than the power of fact," by which he means ". . . that it cannot be the philosophic explanation nor the ultimate reason of anything."¹¹ He states further that ". . . the explanation of authority lies in that which preceded it, and its justification in that which must follow it."¹² This is clearly a functional concept of authority. A fact is a matter of experience of some kind, otherwise it would not be known. This also suggests that since the fact is known to man, man also interprets its meaning.

Robert S. Bilheimer, as North American Program Secretary of the World Council of Churches, wrote that authority can be

¹¹Sabatier, p. xxvi.

¹²Ibid.

intrinsic. After commenting that inspiration, enlightenment, and judgment are at the heart of ecumenical action, he added: "None of them, however, are enforced; their authority is intrinsic. . . . The authority and influence of the ecumenical movement rest solely upon the truth of its pronouncements, the evident need of its appeals."¹³ Bilheimer also stated the opinion that the power of the ecumenical movement is "wholly moral" and speaks of ". . . sufficient truth and intrinsic power as to compel conscience."¹⁴ This implies that what is considered by a man to be true exercises an authority over him. But the next question is whether a fact is important and necessary. Certainly there is an intrinsic authority inherent in a demonstrated or accepted fact, but unless the fact is relevant to a man's concerns, it may not make any important difference to him.

But if the interpretation of a fact or an event does vitally concern an individual, does the individual have a right to his interpretation when it disagrees with the interpretation of the majority? Can there be more than one final authority? Sabatier states that "authority is the right of the species over the individual, autonomy is the right of the individual with regard to the species."¹⁵ This suggests that

¹³Robert S. Bilheimer, "Problems in Ecumenical Action," The Ecumenical Review, IV (July, 1952), 360.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Sabatier, p. xviii.

the individual must at least check his interpretation of facts with the interpretation of others; it recognizes the practical problem which arises when every person claims to be his own authority. The group must have some authority over the individual, yet group authority so easily lends itself to disregard for the rights of the individual. It seems necessary for a group to have authority over the members of the group to prevent a member of the group from destroying the group. Thus treason is considered deserving of the most severe punishment. This conflict of the authority of the individual versus the authority of the group is well illustrated by the experience of the Hebrews with their prophets. Seen from a prophet's viewpoint, a majority interpretation of God's will might be unacceptable to a prophet because of his first-hand experience which contradicted the majority interpretation. Therefore, Amos declared that the majority expectation of joy on the Day of the Lord was wrong,¹⁶ and so he was asked to leave the city. There can be only one final authority in religion as there can be only one almighty God, although individuals may disagree concerning what authority a group may rightfully exercise over an individual or an individual exercise over a group.

Randolph Crump Miller, a professor of Christian education at Yale University Divinity School, states that "Authority in religion is simply rightful power."¹⁷ But this

¹⁶Amos 5:18; 7:10-13.

¹⁷Randolph Crump Miller, The Clue to Christian Education (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 171.

immediately calls for consideration of what power is "rightful." Miller thinks "rightful power" is "moral persuasion" which comes from men's acceptance of it. "It is something offered and accepted as truth. There is, then, (according to Miller) no distinction between religions of authority and of the spirit, for where there is authority the Spirit of God is active."¹⁸ For Miller, Jesus illustrates the truth of this. But the statement that ". . . where there is authority the Spirit of God is active" does not answer the question because of conflicting claims concerning when and where the Spirit of God is active and what It says. We would surely agree that God as our creator has "rightful authority" over us, but this authority impinges directly upon us. God calls forth witnesses and servants, but He maintains His authority in a direct relationship to each person. Any person's or institution's religious power over a person must submit to the evaluation of the individual before it can exercise "moral persuasion" over him. But any evaluation of a claim for authority implies a criterion which is a higher or more basic authority. Because God is the creator of men, He is the final authority over men. This final authority He cannot delegate without abdicating. God calls men to be responsible witnesses and servants and holds them accountable for carrying the Good News of His love and concern to all mankind. Men should do all in their

¹⁸Ibid.

power to help other people accept the authority and love of God, but they should recognize that God's authority impinges directly upon each person, although God utilizes the services of men as bearers of His word and love. Even Jesus the Christ thought of himself as a servant but not the final authority.¹⁹

But is "the power to demand obedience . . . inherent in the concept of authority," as Biddle thinks?²⁰ This could be true in religion only in the case of God as the final authority. In matters of religious belief, coercion is violence to a man's integrity. God has given man the opportunity to deny Him. God reserves only the final judgment which means loss of opportunity for those who persist in their denial. If God does not coerce men but rather invites them, it is presumptuous that man should claim the prerogative of coercion in matters of religion. This does not say that men may not have differences of opinion, but it does say that there should be no persecution, especially in the sense of torture and execution.

J. Donald Butler, Associate Professor of History and Philosophy of Education at Princeton Theological Seminary, states that ". . . true authority . . . is the authoritative

¹⁹Below, pp. 76-77.

²⁰W. Earl Biddle, p. 135.

giving evidence of its existence and of its essence."²¹ He speaks of it eliciting ". . . responses which are prompted by and which also are expressions of respect for the authoritative."²² This refers us to experience, for how can we know this except by experience? If true authority gives evidence of itself, then this evidence is surely basic to any decision regarding what is authoritative. And evidence cannot be known outside of human experience. The responsibility for making the decision still rests with the individual, depending upon what responses are elicited in his experience.

In summary, the nature of authority in religion is the claim of God upon us. This claim cannot be known outside of experience, and any claims of men to represent this claim must be evaluated in the light of experience. The nature of authority is to have the final word. This God has, but we know it only as we recognize God's claim impinging upon our lives. Therefore, we must evaluate all claims of men to religious authority over us and all claims of the authority of revelations received or claimed by others. We have to decide what to accept as authoritative and what God in His authority wills. We can and must consider the testimony of the experiences claimed by others and weigh our own

²¹J. Donald Butler, "The Christian View of Man and the Meaning of Freedom and Authority in Education," *Religious Education*, XLVIII (November-December, 1953), 399.

²²Ibid.

interpretations of our experiences in the light of others' interpretations of theirs, but the final decision is ours. Within the limits of our ability, our own experiences and thinking are authoritative for what we accept as the final authority.

The Necessity and Function of Authority

As we have seen, by the very nature of authority there can be only one final authority. But there are numerous claims concerning subordinate authorities and their power or rights over the individual. Therefore, we must not only speak of authority but of authorities. Of these there are many kinds and various degrees. First, we are not born into this world as mature persons. As the first chapter of Genesis states, we are created in God's image,²³ but this does not necessarily imply maturity. The history of the human race would suggest rather that the basic element of spirituality is created in us, but that there is the necessity of growth as each person becomes aware of himself as an individual, faces the necessity of making choices, and learns by experience of the consequences, good or bad. It is the awareness of supra-physical persons, and supremely the Person of God, that marks us as in some sense akin to God and in some degree in His image as a person. We are not gods, but as we mature, we have the opportunity to reflect a likeness of God--to reflect his image.

²³Genesis 1:26-27.

Beyond a child's physical and affectional needs, the next authority that he encounters is his parents, or parent-substitute. At first a child has so little experience that outside of his own instincts he has no inherent guide for action. And so for his own future good, there must be authority over him--authority capable of preventing him from rolling off the table or into the fire or onto a furnace or off a cliff. But as the child grows older, authority over his physical actions is gradually and partially relaxed and turned over to him. When a normal child experiences the pain of a burn resulting from food too hot for him, he becomes wary, and with a little help will soon learn the meaning of hot in relation to food and will become appropriately careful. Of course, he may forget, but the ensuing experience will make him less likely to forget the next time. Then he soon recognizes that food that is too hot to eat steams, and he can take the responsibility himself--he no longer needs an authority over him at this point. We could construct similar analogies for the learning and maturing process in other areas. For instance, children are often quite possessive about toys and little possessions, but as they experience dissatisfaction because of their possessiveness, they usually learn not to be so possessive. Then the child can play reciprocally with other children without an authority standing over him all the time. He has matured and can take the responsibility himself. Thus, clearly, direct authority over the actions of the immature is

necessary. But the purpose of the authority is to help the child grow to the point where he has accepted responsibility so that outward authority will not be needed. Sabatier says that "authority . . . has its roots in the organic conditions of the species, and its end in the formation of the individual."²⁴ He points out that this is a pedagogical function which ends when the individual has been educated.²⁵ The authority we give schools and churches is essentially for the same purpose. This is not to ignore the negative function of authority in preventing people from doing things which the majority thinks are wrong, and in apprehending them and trying to influence their behavior for the better after they have done wrong. But the primary purpose of any educative authority is to help bring about positive growth. The primary purpose of discipline is to add additional inducement to growth. Certainly there are other institutions wielding authority over us, but these are primarily of a regulative nature, and so are outside the scope of this study of freedom and authority in religion, although they are necessary for our good.

The most basic issue in the problem of authority in life comes to the fore in the field of religious education, for it is here that people try to help their children profit from what they think is true about the meaning and purpose of

²⁴Sabatier, p. xxi.

²⁵Ibid.

life and, therefore, how a person should live and the kind of person he should strive to be.

Almost everyone begins his religious life on the basis of authority--as a child he accepts what he is told as true unless he has had experience to cause him to doubt it. He may not understand it but he accepts it. It is not so much that he accepts because those teaching him have won his trust, as Strachan suggests,²⁶ but rather that he starts with trust and continues in trust until the trust is betrayed. A growing child will very naturally ask questions as he reflects on what he has been or is being taught, but these questions may be only his seeking for more information and understanding. But if he decides he has been told what is not true, then he withholds his trust. This is as it should be, for the child must maintain his own integrity and refuse to accept what he is convinced is an untruth. And the basis for this choice is in his experience. Teaching authority is acceptable to the child being taught as long as the child believes he is not taught falsely.

As we try to teach our religious convictions to our children, and others who are older, it is very natural that we try to phrase them as clearly as possible and in orderly fashion. Thus we have the development of theology and

²⁶Strachan, The Authority of Christian Experience, p. 99. (He writes: "In the beginnings of our religious life we accept our beliefs on an authority, which it would scarcely be fair to call external; those beliefs are mediated to us through lives and lips that have already won from us a living and personal trust; . . .")

dogmatics. Doctrines are inherent in any religion, and any statement of belief is a statement of doctrine.²⁷ It is also natural that we should want to teach others the best that we know. Parents who thought they should not teach their children anything about religion until the children were old enough to decide for themselves nevertheless taught their children. They taught them, if not by words at least by actions, that they thought they should not teach them about religion; at the same time they taught them that religion was not relevant to the lives of children. We cannot escape it--we teach our doctrines. But how far should we carry our authority over those we teach, and what possible dangers are involved?

The Dangers of Authority

Since the first religious authority that a child normally meets is one or both parents, let us look first at the possible dangers there. Richard V. McCann, Lecturer on the Psychology of Religion at Harvard Divinity School, calls attention to the crucial importance of the kind of relationship between parents and children. For a special part of a study of "Developmental Factors in the Growth of a Mature Faith," ". . . a sub-group of those who came from Protestant

²⁷In discussing this matter, Biddle uses the term dogma, but in the opinion of this writer, it is better to reserve the term dogma for a teaching that is not to be questioned or re-examined. Biddle, p. 123.

fundamentalist backgrounds" was selected.²⁸ The study indicated that:

In fundamentalist Protestant homes, if the early environment is basically unhappy or otherwise traumatic--where there is deprivation of love, of support; or rigid relationships and hence rigid transmission of inelastic, externalized values--the seed for future agnosticism may have been sown. Under such circumstances, future religious development may be blocked and the transmitted values may at some time have to be rejected when they cannot be transformed and re-interpreted, in order to make way for consistency.²⁹

McCann goes on to point out that because of the supernatural and creedal nature of fundamentalist concepts, there is danger they may result in conflict with other information from the community outside the church. Although this may cause the individual to re-evaluate the claims of supposed information from both sources, the reaction often carries him ". . . beyond the line separating reinterpretation and revision from rejection and loss."³⁰ The unfortunate result is that some never find their way to a positive Christian faith and many others come to an intelligent faith only as through fire. The writer of this paper has also seen this very thing happen. He has had in his home university students of fundamentalist backgrounds who rejected religion while in the university. The students met data which

²⁸Richard V. McCann, "Developmental Factors in the Growth of a Mature Faith," Religious Education, L (May-June, 1955), 154. (The sub-group was composed of "ex-fundamentalist agnostics.")

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., p. 155.

demonstrably conflicted with their religion. They did not get help soon enough, and perhaps could not accept emotionally possible reinterpretation which might have helped them solve the problem.

This excessive dominance of authority which we call authoritarianism may also bring such a strong emotional reaction that a person cannot accept new evidence which intellectually should help him solve the problem; to achieve his own individuality, he may feel it is necessary to reject the whole community which has been authoritarian and has unduly dominated him. McCann refers to one such as follows:

Although intellectual emancipation could take place, Weller's emotional attachment to the church which still insisted on its authority and on its barriers against the "world," and to the God who damned or saved arbitrarily, had been too rigid. The absolutist God, the absolutist religious community--and the absolutist father--could not be spiritualized or reinterpreted in his thinking. Yet Weller had to push on towards inner consistency. Since modification of the inconsistent elements, while necessary and possible intellectually, was impossible emotionally, they had to be swept away to clear the path to that consistency and integration, unity, and maturity which are the natural goals of the developing self.³¹

Although we recognize the need for authority in some degree, the danger of the excessive use of authority is extreme. We have but to call to mind the horrors of religious persecution, torture, and execution to realize the dangers to which a complete religious authoritarianism leads. John S. Yearsley asserts that "there is a potential danger

³¹Ibid.

to spiritual freedom in any fixed dogma: but especially whenever there emerges a comprehensive and clearly articulated orthodoxy."³² He points out that "fixed dogma" sets the stage on which violence may develop. He also calls attention to the coercive nature of fixed dogma--it may result in the weight of the Church being thrown against the individual, demanding submission or expulsion.³³ Yearsley is also apprehensive lest the new emphasis on the Church in the ecumenical movement lead us to dogmatism and threaten the freedom of the Spirit.³⁴

The authoritarian rejoinder to this would be to appeal to some authority, such as the Church, the Bible, or tradition to support the claim that the truth had been once and for all fully given and that the primary task of Christians is to keep this truth unadulterated. Therefore, God would be claimed to have given special guidance to protect this truth. This is essentially the Eastern Orthodox position as expressed by George Florovsky.³⁵ The basic difficulty with this position is that it considers a particular assertion of the content of truth to be the only truth. It fails to recognize that any statement of truth is finite and

³²John S. Yearsley, "The Revival of Dogmatism," The Congregational Quarterly, X·XIV (July, 1956), 220.

³³Ibid., p. 221.

³⁴Ibid., p. 223.

³⁵Florovsky, The Student World, XLIII (First Quarter, 1950), 69-70.

limited by the conditions, experiences, and insights of whoever phrases it. But if one person or one church or one religion thinks he or it has the final truth and the responsibility to see that the people of the world are saved by acceptance of this truth, then the stage is set for authoritarian coercion, and persecution if the conditions are such as to allow it. Even Jesus did not force his teachings upon people, although he taught them with the conviction and authority that comes from first-hand experience. And even though he had told the rich young man what he must do to gain eternal life, Jesus allowed him to reject it and was grieved over it.³⁶

Another danger of authoritarianism is its demand for conformity.³⁷ If it is considered that the truth has been correctly given, then that truth should not be denied or deviated from. Dr. Harold A. Bosley calls attention to the danger of the demand for conformity, especially in the field of ethics.³⁸ He points out that authority ". . . cannot coerce the details of empirical problems into its prescriptive patterns."³⁹ Therefore, we must fall back upon "regulative

³⁶Mark 10:17-22.

³⁷G. Bromley Oxnam, On This Rock--An Appeal for Christian Unity (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1951), p. 86. (The Third Series of The William Henry Hoover Lectureship on Christianity Unity at the Disciples Divinity House of the University of Chicago comprise this book.)

³⁸Harold A. Bosley, The Quest for Religious Certainty (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Company, 1939), p. 213.

³⁹Ibid.

principles" which guide us in our facing of concrete problems.

This demand for conformity is clearly illustrated in an article on "Authority and Freedom" by A. G. Hebert in which he states that ". . . Christian doctrine is concerned with the work of God for man's salvation, and therefore with a truth which comes to us with authority."⁴⁰ Yearsley's apprehension of an accent upon dogmatism in the ecumenical movement is given some real point by consideration of the following statement by Hebert:

It is not a matter of agreements being made, whether doctrinal or administrative, to limit human freedom to differ and secure cooperation; for the Church is concerned with God's truth and God's saving action. The United Church of the future will not appeal for men's cooperation; it will come to them with authority, speaking to them in Christ's Name, and calling them to share in that unity by which He has made them one.⁴¹

But we should ask Hebert to consider God's authoritative appeal through Christ for the positive and willing cooperation of men. The appeal through Christ was to the minds and hearts of men and supported by the quality of the message and Servant, not by his coercion. To be concerned about the salvation of all people is a very good thing, but it surely does not allow a coercive approach which Christ even refused to use. We should recognize that authority cannot impose religious conviction. Sabatier writes that "this is why the

⁴⁰A. Gabriel Hebert, "Authority and Freedom," Anglican Theological Review, XXXI (October, 1949), 217. (This was The Page Lecture delivered at the Berkeley Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut, November 22, 1948.)

⁴¹ibid.

inward tribunal is the last appeal for every conscious adult individual."⁴² Christ appealed to this "inward tribunal" and did not resort to coercion, although he pointed out the bad results of refusal to respond positively to God's love and will for us.

Authoritarianism also discourages critical examination. An authority wants to be accepted at the face value of its claim and not to be put to the test. This discourages the kind of inquiry which normally leads to growth and maturity. Dr. David E. Roberts calls attention to this danger by saying:

For the most part the churches have not yet learned that the best way to pass from defensive rationalism to secure faith is to let doubts, inconsistencies, confusions and rebellions come out into the open instead of using various forms of spiritual coercion to keep them hidden or to drive them from awareness altogether. . . . Secure faith . . . rests upon an integration between rational belief and emotional commitment.⁴³

Related to this danger of discouragement of critical examination is the encouragement to take our authorities whole. It is a common occurrence that a person who has become publicly known because of his work in one field tends to be looked to as an authority in other fields. If a person is dependable at one point, we tend to think of him as dependable at all points. The unfortunate thing is that we tend to like power and to encourage the uncritical acceptance

⁴²Sabatier, p. 322.

⁴³David E. Roberts, Psychotherapy and a Christian View of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 72.

of our views by others. Strachan refers to the saying that " . . . there is not nearly so much danger of men choosing the wrong authorities, as that, when they have made their choice, they should insist on taking their authorities whole; in other words, treating them as infallible."⁴⁴ He recognizes the difficulty and unpleasantness which often comes with disagreeing with someone a person respects, yet stresses the necessity of not taking our authorities whole. He thinks the Christian religion has suffered severely from this tendency to take our authorities whole, and that this misunderstands the nature of the authority of the Bible and of Christ. This tendency expresses itself in feeling that if one statement in the Bible is proven wrong, then the Bible has lost all authority, or that if Christ held ideas contrary to demonstrable scientific knowledge of our day, then we can have no faith in Christ.⁴⁵ A realistic view of life shows that no man's claim to or about authority should be taken whole, but should be tested in the light of experience.

In addition to the dangerous tendency to take our authorities whole, there is the tendency to put our faith in some human person or institution. When this is done, as Sabatier points out, the institution or the person becomes the object of faith.⁴⁶ Sabatier thinks this is what happened

⁴⁴Strachan, p. 218.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Sabatier, p. 171.

when the Roman Catholic Church declared herself infallible. When this happens, then the institution must be viewed as the final authority and each person is required to submit to it. This way lies the dogmatism which countenances no contrary opinions and seeks to control all of life according to its precepts. This is not an idle fear.

A Roman Catholic priest, the Rev. Jean de la Croix Kaelin, who has represented the Roman Catholic position and thinking at several World Student Christian Federation conferences, asserts that ". . . the Church's authority is directly exercised only in the realm of theology, and does not touch that of philosophy, or even less so that of science . . ."47 But there is an "except" immediately following in this sentence which makes a great deal of difference. Kaelin continues: ". . . except to the degree that that faith is susceptible of being indirectly affected by these disciplines."48 This leaves the door open for intervention by the religious authority into the teaching in the other fields of study. Not that these other fields of study may not sometimes need some counsel; but by the very nature of the Roman Catholic claims, which are the authoritarian approach par excellence, the tendency is not to counsel and reason on the issue but to require.

47Jean de la Croix Kaelin, O.P., "A Catholic Looks at Academic Freedom," The Student World, XLVII (Second Quarter, 1954), 145.

48Ibid.

Kaelin speaks of the different degrees of the "adhesion which the Church requires of its children" ranging from ". . . the faith which leaves no place for doubt, and where the obedience aspect loses its importance before the aspect of mysterious communion with divine truth . . ." to ". . . the other rare although possible extreme, that of pure obedience."⁴⁹ We could raise a question whether "the obedience aspect" ever "loses its importance before the aspect of mysterious communion with divine truth" because this would remove the right of the individual to disagree with the Church's pronouncement of what is divine truth. And then freedom is lost, only to be regained with great struggle and loss. In the case of a teacher whose teaching is unsatisfactory because of his opinions, Kaelin states that in the action of the Roman Congregation requesting ". . . that an exegete not profess such or such an opinion . . . it does not always intend to demand an interior assent of the intellect, but the submission of the will and practical attitude."⁵⁰ This implies, however, that sometimes an "interior assent of the intellect" is demanded. It is also questionable whether the will and intellect can be separated in such a way. Kaelin recognizes that the field of teaching is really not untouched by Roman Catholic principles here, but claims free research is untouched. He admits that a faithful Roman Catholic scholar may not be

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 146.

⁵⁰Ibid.

allowed to teach an opinion which is evident to him, ". . . but still judged not sufficiently certain for the Magisterium . . ."51 Is not this protection for authoritarian dogma? Even if a scholar should look at the evidence against a certain dogma, he cannot teach it, and any line of thinking which threatens the infallible authority of the institution must be held only privately and not expressed. Surely a person conditioned in such an authoritarian climate would be inhibited from engaging in free inquiry and from expressing a frowned-upon opinion; only the very hardy souls driven by first-hand experience, like Luther, would dare to do so. It is also next to impossible to continue to do free research and follow where the evidence points without in some way expressing what one honestly thinks the evidence means.

At the close of his article, Kaelin quotes from a book by L. E. de Lubac, S.J., titled Méditation sur l'Eglise, where the case is stated even stronger. Lubac states the standard Roman Catholic claim that ". . . the Church commands only because it obeys God," and that "the Catholic knows . . . that obedience is the price of liberty, as it is the condition of unity . . ."52 The case is stated even more bluntly when

51 Ibid.

52 L. E. de Lubac, S.J., Méditation sur l'Eglise (Paris: 1953), p. 199, quoted by Kaelin, The Student World, XLVII (Second Quarter, 1954), 146.

Lubac writes:

. . . at all times, whether the man who orders him in the name of God be right or wrong, whether he be blind or clairvoyant, whether his intentions be pure or mixed, from the moment that this man is invested with legitimate authority and does not command evil, the other knows that he will always be wrong if he disobeys.⁵³

But we could ask, "What if the same man who commands evil has taught evil?" Does not the individual have the responsibility to choose, and may the live option of choice be taken from the individual by the system, even though theoretically he should have the choice to refuse to do evil even when the highest authority in the Church commanded it? This equating of obedience to God with obedience to, eventually, the Pope, is a basic error. Lubac states that the Roman Catholic knows ". . . by an a priori conviction of faith which nothing may weaken . . ." that he will be wrong if he disobeys.⁵⁴ But if at this point one has to fall back on an "a priori conviction of faith," we should ask, "Why not use this 'a priori conviction of faith' as the court of appeal regularly, rather than just in an extreme emergency when it would not likely be able to function because it had been so conditioned otherwise?" Lubac stresses the importance of learning obedience. From the authoritarian standpoint it is important to teach complete and unquestioning obedience which will never threaten the claimed authority.

Against the minimization of the dangers of a dominant

⁵³Ibid., pp. 199-202.

⁵⁴Ibid.

authoritarian church to academic freedom, and eventually religious freedom, we should look at the situation in Italy. Immediately following the article by Kaelin just referred to above, an anonymous article appeared with the title "Confessionalism and Academic Freedom" with an editorial note which read as follows:

This short article has been written by a friend of the Federation who has been able to observe the situation in Italian universities. For personal reasons he has asked to remain anonymous. . . . Our intention in publishing it is not to indulge in confessional controversy, but simply to give an opportunity for expression of the point of view of people who have to face the repercussions of a particular Roman Catholic attitude in university life.⁵⁵

This "friend of the Federation" begins his article with an extensive quote from Father F. Cavalli, S.J., writing in the April 1948 number of Civiltà Cattolica, the organ of the Society of Jesus. Cavalli writes in part:

The Catholic Church, convinced by her divine prerogative of being the one true Church, must have sole claim to the right to freedom, for it is only to truth, and never to error, that freedom can be granted; as for other religions, the Catholic Church will not resort to violence, but will ask that, by methods which are both legitimate and worthy of the human person, they be not allowed to spread false doctrine. Thus, in a state where Catholics are in the majority, the Church will ask that legal existence be not granted to error and that, if there are minorities of a different religion, they

⁵⁵Anon., "Confessionalism and Academic Freedom," The Student World, XLVII (Second Quarter, 1954), 148. (There isn't any direct indication whether the author of this article is a Protestant or non-church, or even a Roman Catholic--it would be extremely interesting if it were a Roman Catholic!)

be allowed to exist, and no more than that, and that they will not be given the opportunity of disclosing their beliefs.⁵⁶

The latter part of this quotation from Cavalli refers also to civil religious liberty and points up the close connection between religious freedom in a civil state and religious freedom within a religion. Fortunately, the battle for civil religious liberty has been removed from the arena of armed conflict in most of the countries where Protestantism is dominant. There is some development evident in Roman Catholic thinking when the official organ of the Society of Jesus carries Cavalli's statement that " . . . the Catholic Church will not resort to violence . . . " against those they consider to be in religious error and therefore not deserving of freedom to teach their views. The field of civil religious liberty is important and closely related to the problem of authority and freedom in religion, but cannot be included in this study. This is not to say that the battle is won once-and-for-all in our country, as the existence and concerns of Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State testify that it is not.

The claim that any one church or religion has the "sole claim to the right of freedom" because it, and it only, has the truth exhibits two tremendous errors. First, it ignores the fact that statements of truth, even within the

⁵⁶p. Cavalli, S.J., Civiltà Catholica (April, 1948), quoted in "Confessionalism and Academic Freedom," The Student World, XLVII (Second Quarter, 1954), 143.

Roman Catholic Church, are the product of the thinking of people, and were often determined and pronounced without full agreement. The Arian controversy alone illustrates this fact. Furthermore, any claim to special institutional guidance by the Holy Spirit is open to a similar contradictory claim of guidance by the Holy Spirit by those who honestly believe otherwise. Then, to determine who is really guided by the Holy Spirit, it is necessary to appeal to some other claimed evidence as authority, such as the Bible or the quality of life or experience. The claim to truth has to be substantiated somehow with something. Probably this is why Sabatier states that "an authority which discusses ceases to be absolute, since by the mere fact of discussing and advancing arguments it recognizes the supremacy of the tribunal of reason."⁵⁷ Sabatier also points out that " . . . an authority that is not infallible . . . is limited and relative."⁵⁸ Therefore, an institution or person claiming absolute authority can allow no opportunities for the arguments of the opposition to be heard, if it can possibly prevent them in any way it considers justifiable.

The other basic error in the Roman Catholic argument so well stated by Cavalli is thinking of truth and error in non-personal terms. But truth is never known in human existence without a person being involved. Likewise, error cannot be dealt with except in a person. Therefore, to say

⁵⁷Sabatier, p. 12.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 264.

that error has no rights tends to mean that a person guilty of error has no rights. This is at least part of the attitude and mistake that underlies the Roman Catholic position and that makes the Roman Catholic Church less sensitive to the rights of non-Roman Catholics as human beings. It is closely related to the backward view which says that all truth has in principle been given, and especially that no dogma of the Roman Catholic Church has ever been in error. This error also ignores the basic freedom of the Christian man who is ultimately responsible only to God and who must have freedom of choice to develop.

The position that error has no right to be heard also betrays a tendency to think in terms of an opinion or a conviction being all right or all wrong. This is so untrue to life that it is obviously false. Seldom are statements in the realm of ethics and abstract truth completely true or completely false. The history of the Protestant Churches themselves shows that what was considered to be the complete truth of the theory of verbal inspiration of the Bible has, to the satisfaction of most people who have studied the matter with an open mind, been proven false. This does not mean that the Bible is not inspired--the theory was right in stating the Bible is inspired--but the attempted statement of the degree of inspiration was wrong. If what is considered by some to be error has no opportunity to be examined, then we are bound by the opinions of the past which supposedly can never be reconsidered, as the Roman Catholics claim for their

dogma, and we have no way of knowing the past decisions were right; we could only parrot them in blind faith.

Now let us look at what is happening in Italy as a result of this Roman Catholic authoritarian approach. The "friend of the Federation" reports actual cases where influence and pressure have been brought to bear to determine who shall teach and what shall be taught in some of the universities of Italy. In the University of Messina, the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy decided on a Protestant as professor of church history. Then a member of the Faculty Council questioned the expediency of this. It appears that the influence of a Jesuit, who had been a former member of the University of Messina faculty, resulted finally, not only in the Protestant professor not teaching church history, but in the elimination of the subject from the curriculum of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy. And it would not be enough just to have a Roman Catholic teach church history--it would have to be an orthodox Roman Catholic.⁵⁹ Thus the freedom to study church history officially in the University of Messina is denied, in practice, and according to Roman Catholic thinking, error will not have a chance to be heard or to be examined. The "friend of the Federation" concludes that " . . . all confessionalism, can only compromise the truth itself."⁶⁰

⁵⁹"Confessionalism and Academic Freedom," The Student World, XLVII (Second Quarter, 1954), 150-52.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 153.

But the danger of authoritarianism, especially this particular authoritarianism, does not stop here. The ideal is always complete dominance, and any limiting concordat, or minority or plural religious circumstance, is only a situation to be worked through in the direction of complete Roman Catholic dominance.⁶¹ Facing this kind of long-run purpose and determination, we must never forget that eternal vigilance is the price of religious as well as political freedom.

Theodore M. Greene, former Professor of Philosophy in Yale University, is also alert to the dangers if either religion or education "congeals into dogmatic self-sufficiency." He asserts that "if religion sets faith in opposition to reason it will inevitably value orthodoxy more highly than a living faith in a living God and substitute indoctrination for reasonable persuasion, training in correct beliefs for vital spiritual growth."⁶² Secular reason can lead to similar

⁶¹Cavalli, Civiltà Catholica, quoted in The Student World (April, 1948), 143-49, "... according to the extent to which either concrete circumstances, a hostile government or the numerical strength of dissident groups are such as to prevent the total application of this principle [that only truth has the right to freedom], the Church will request for itself the most generous concessions possible, to the point of accepting as a lesser ill the legal toleration of other creeds: thus in a few countries Catholics will have to go as far as requesting themselves full religious freedom for everyone, and being content to be able to co-exist with others in the place where they alone have a right to exist. In this case the Church does not give up its thesis, which is the most imperative of laws, but adapts itself to the hypothesis, that is, to actual conditions, from which its concrete life cannot abstract itself."

⁶²Theodore M. Greene, "Religion and Philosophies of Education" (Second Speech on the subject at the Second Assembly of the Golden Anniversary Convention of the Religious Education Association at the University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Penn., Nov. 8-10, 1953), Religious Education, XLIX (March-April, 1954), 84.

danger, if it is not balanced by religious insights.

Another great danger of excessive authority in religion is the tendency for a legalistic attitude to develop toward what is considered to be the final truth. This is exactly what happened in Judaism and was dominant during the earthly lifetime of Jesus. Unless what is considered to be the truth is spelled out primarily in principle, a moralistic ethics develops which kills the spirit of the law. Then ceremony and particular religious acts become more important than justice, mercy, and love.

Along with this tendency toward legalism is the temptation to a false security. It is well known that in times of crisis we tend to feel insecure and then seek security. And when one form of expected security disappoints us, we seek for another. M. M. Thomas, formerly active in the World's Student Christian Federation, thinks our disillusionment with secular humanism tends to make us look to dominating religion for security. He cautions that "there is no religion which is secure into which those who feel the insecurity of secular life may run and be safe, or whose domination will save the secular world."⁶³ Rather, he writes, the Church and the world are both guilty of sin and stand under judgment. Refusing to face the struggle and turning the real decisions over to "authorities" may be one of the great sins to which

⁶³M. M. Thomas, "An Irrelevant Profession?" The Student World, XLIII (Fourth Quarter, 1950), 318.

insecurity tempts us.

Another danger of authoritarianism is the tendency to overstate the case. This may be related to what Thouless refers as ". . . a general tendency for a religious proposition to be either asserted or denied with a high degree of certainty."⁶⁴ He thinks that because ". . . doubt or partial belief is unstable and uncomfortable" they ". . . tend, therefore, to be spontaneously suppressed so that the psychologically more agreeable state of definite opinion one way or the other may be substituted."⁶⁵ He concludes, therefore, that

this suppression has as its psychological effect a high degree of feeling of certainty about the accepted proposition and hostility towards those denying it. This hostility is, no doubt, part of the driving-force behind religious intolerance and persecution. Secondly, religion is a practical activity. If one has chosen an opinion, any thought of the possibility of the truth of its opposite tends to weaken effort and is therefore unserviceable to action. This gives a more rational ground for hostility against those who question one's accepted beliefs.⁶⁶

This sounds reasonable and suggests some understanding of the causes of extreme statements. Nevertheless, extreme statements cause real harm by calling forth extreme opposition. Joseph Lookstein, Rabbi of Congregation Kehilath Jeshurum and Professor of Sociology at Yeshiva University in New York City, observes that ". . . intemperance begets

⁶⁴Thouless, p. 52.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 53.

intemperance and extremism engenders extremism."⁶⁷ Later, in referring to the controversy over parochial schools and day schools, he laments: "If only the zealots among the proponents and opponents could be restrained!"⁶⁸ Then he thinks we could consider such matters more calmly, fairly, and rationally. We could wish for the same restraint in other religious issues. It seems that blind adherence to old formulations of belief, and ignorance or misunderstanding of new data, leaves some Christians open to justified attack, and often leads to extreme forms of attack because of the absurdity of their position when seen from an unsympathetic person on the other side, especially one who values free inquiry. This may be part of the explanation of the extremes to which Robert Ingersoll went to combat what he considered to be untrue. He seems actually to have been outraged by the refusal of some Christians to accept new evidence.⁶⁹ He also seems to have been outraged by the authoritarian lengths to which Christians had gone to try to compel belief and recantation or death.⁷⁰ Extremism tends to bring extremism

⁶⁷Joseph Lookstein, "Strategies for Making Adequate Provision of Religious Education for All Our Young," Second Speech at the Third Assembly of the Golden Anniversary Convention of the Religious Education Association, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Nov. 8-10, 1953, Religious Education, XLIX (March-April, 1954), 95.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 98.

⁶⁹Robert G. Ingersoll, The Gods, and Other Lectures, Part II, "Some Mistakes of Moses" (New York: Willey Book Co., 1938), pp. 13-25. (But he does have some good things to say, especially in the Preface to Part I of this collection.)

⁷⁰Ibid., Part I. (See especially his "Heretics and Heresies," pp. 209-253.)

in return, but we can hardly clear either side of responsibility. For if extremism engenders equally opposite extremism, there is no hope. On both sides responsibility must be taken to be fair and to be careful not to jump to conclusions about the meaning of what another person has said. This writer has experienced having his words interpreted by another person with the meaning these words would have meant had the other person spoken them, with the result that the original meaning was badly misrepresented. The problem was partly that the second person was looking for something he could criticize rather than first trying to understand why the statement had first been made and what was really meant and not meant. Overstatement of the case often results partly because of misunderstanding of what is meant by the other side.

Biddle thinks that "Galileo's thesis, The Great Systems of the Universe, was offensive to the churchmen, not because of the scientific truths it contained, but because of its satirical references to the Bible."⁷¹ There may be a question whether there was sufficient other knowledge to have assimilated Galileo's scientific findings without real difficulty, but it certainly behooves the discoverers of new evidence to be careful not to claim too much for it, nor force it upon others, nor consider as fools those who, because of their background and lack of information, do not have the

⁷¹Biddle, p. 119.

basis to understand and accept it.

Thouless thinks that "the use of intemperate language by the early makers of creeds when condemning the heretics . . . was . . . one step on the road leading Christian believers from the teachings of Christ to the practice of appalling cruelties."⁷² This may well be true, for what is thought to be "righteous" indignation has some of the inhibitions to extreme action removed, and immoderate action tends to result. Thus, it was widely considered that almost nothing was too bad to do to the Japanese after the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. And so we presumed to sing "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition!"

Nevertheless, the argument against overstating the case should not be overstated. Let us at least allow for the possibility that there may be times and situations which call for overemphasis in order to get a hearing. Kierkegaard thought he faced such a situation and writes that he had to make the attack upon "Christendom" with great force lest the issue be ignored and passed over without any correction.⁷³ This may have been true, yet we may also ask whether the seeds of defeat are in extreme statements of a position. People begin to react adversely when statements become distinctly

⁷²Thouless, p. 45.

⁷³Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, Journals, quoted in Attack Upon "Christendom," 1854-1855, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 78; also The Point of View, trans. Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 34-39.

misrepresentative of the opposition and opposing points of view, and then people lose faith in the fairness of the critic. Kierkegaard would be much easier for us to understand were some of his statements less extreme. It also seems that indulgence in a little extremism breeds more indulgence until a person is in danger of being carried away by his own indulgence. Dr. Rood suggests that Luther may have been "caught up by his own daring and the enthusiasm of his students . . ." when he burned the Canon Law, apparently without premeditation.⁷⁴

In considering the question of authority in religion, we have seen the necessity of at least some authority in teaching children. It appears that the primary purpose of authority in religion is educative. However, it also appears that there is danger that the exercise of authority by an individual or an institution may easily become domination and prevent growth into Christian maturity. Included in the dangers of the excessive use of authority in religion are the insistence on conformity and the tendency to persecute the nonconformists, the discouragement and limitation of critical thinking and free inquiry, the encouragement to place unlimited faith in a human person or an institution, and the

⁷⁴Wayne Ray Rood, "Dark, Amid the Blaze of Noon: Education and the Reformation: an Historical Analysis of the Influence of Educational Philosophy and Practice upon the Religious Character of the Protestant Reformation, and an Interpretation of the Role of Education in the Conservative Revision of Evangelical Principles following the Peasants' Revolt," Unpublished Th.D. thesis, Pacific School of Religion, 1949, p. 303.

encouragement of the tendency to take our authorities whole. There are also dangers in the tendencies to overstate the case for a position or doctrine, to become legalistic, to seek complete control of life and thought according to the dictates of the authority.

In view of all these dangers of the misuse of authority which becomes authoritarianism, what are and should be the limits of authority in religion? First, let us keep in mind that the highest ultimate spiritual welfare of each person is the goal for which all Christians should be concerned. The real problem is how this can be accomplished to the greatest possible degree. Theoretically at least, the purpose of torture during the inquisition was to bring recantation which would supposedly save the tortured person's soul from hell. And if the victim did not recant, then it was considered better that he die than live to teach his errors. But what might the persecuted person have come to believe had he continued to live? Might he have recanted and then been a power for the truth as the majority saw it? But the problem of how much freedom of thought, belief, and action is allowable is a problem that is always with us. The real issue is where to draw the line. And the line will be drawn according to a complex of factors including the general cultural outlook; the concept of God, His will and purpose for us, and how He works; and what brings spiritual growth in a person. Periods of crisis and insecurity tend to cause people to look to an authority which they think will

give them security. This is partly because doubt and indecision tend to inhibit definitive action, and so people seek assurance that they can conscientiously take definitive action. Thus, for any decision concerning the limits of the use of authority, the concept of the nature, will, purpose, and method of God in dealing with people, along with a view of the nature, potential, and limitations of man, are of key importance. Therefore, the next chapter will be a consideration of the nature of God and of man. Then, after we have considered the nature, function, and dangers of freedom in religion, we shall return to the problem of the desirable limits of authority as well as freedom. The limits of both authority and freedom should be considered together, for they are part of the same problem.

CHAPTER III

THE NATURE OF GOD AND OF MAN

All concepts of God, and of man, if taken seriously, have far-reaching consequences for the meaning and living of life. Whether the concepts are explicit or implicit, they are important. It may be that a person's concepts develop and are refined as a person encounters new data which must be faced honestly and either rejected as invalid or accepted as indicating an improved understanding of truth. Or it may be that a person is unaware of his precise concepts and simply reflects the cultural patterns and mores of the society of which he is a part without examining them critically. To live, a person must act, and every act has some purpose which is considered worth the effort, at least for the immediate present if not for the future. Thereby pre-suppositions and implications about the meaning and living of life are inescapably involved.

It is not intended here to write a dissertation on the nature of God or of man, but rather to state the approach and position of this writer on these concepts as they bear on the question of authority and freedom in the Protestant churches and the problem of Christian education for adolescents and adults. The attempt here is to outline the

doctrines of both God and man which are those reflected in the life and teachings of Jesus as understood by the writer and related to the concerns of this study. This implies that the highest understanding of God and His will for man are revealed in and through Jesus the Christ.

The Nature of God and His Will

God is the creator and sustainer of life. Whether God is the creator is not discussed by Jesus; he simply assumes the creatorship of God. As Millar Burrows, Winkley Professor of Biblical Theology at Yale University Divinity School points out, the problem for the Hebrews was not atheism but polytheism.¹ The Old Testament stories of creation clearly assume that God is the creator of the universe and of life, and there is no indication Jesus raised any question at this point.

As Jesus considered God to be the creator of the universe and of life, he also considered God to be the sustainer of the universe and of life. Thus Jesus spoke of God providing food for the birds, and reasoned that if God is concerned to provide for the birds, surely He will provide for the meeting of the needs of men, who are surely of more value.²

The God implied in the life and teachings of Jesus

¹Millar Burrows, An Outline of Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 54.

²Matt. 6:25-34; Lk. 12:22-31.

is a person. Jesus prayed to God³ and taught his disciples to pray to God.⁴ Jesus drew sustaining strength from prayer and expected his disciples to do likewise. Clearly Jesus did not consider God to be just an impersonal force or a remote being who was unconcerned for the universe and the life which he had created. Jesus implied that God hears the prayers of men,⁵ and that men can trust God to care even more for their welfare than would the best human parents.⁶

Jesus taught that God loves and is concerned for every person and wants every person to respond to His love and enter His Kingdom; it is not God's first choice that anyone should perish.⁷ In fact, Jesus represented God as being so concerned that no one perish unnecessarily that, like a good shepherd, He does not wait for the lost one to come back but goes out seeking it,⁸ and is overjoyed when He finds it.⁹

Jesus taught that God is merciful. Jesus did not teach or imply that God has set up any barriers of wounded pride or legalistic balancing of merits that hold sinners

³Matt. 14:23; Lk. 6:46; Matt. 26:39-44; Mk. 13:35-39; Lk. 22:41-44.

⁴Matt. 6:9-15; Lk. 11:2-4; Matt. 12:38; Lk. 22:40.

⁵Matt. 7:7-11; Lk. 11:9-13; Matt. 6:5-15; Lk. 11:1-4.

⁶Matt. 7:9-11; Lk. 11:11-13.

⁷Matt. 18:14; John 3:16.

⁸Matt. 18:10-13; Lk. 15:4-6.

⁹Matt. 18:13; Lk. 15:6-7.

at a distance. Rather, Jesus taught that God's forgiveness waits only on the response of the sinner--a response which expresses honestly and sincerely, "I admit and repent of my sins, ask forgiveness, and intend to lead a new life."¹⁰ It is only natural that a repentant person should want to make amends for his sins; Jesus encouraged such action.¹¹ However, there are some sins, for example, murder, which cannot be corrected or completely atoned for; they can only be forgiven. But God fully forgives the sincerely repentant person and pays the late-comers into the vineyard the same as those who came earlier.¹² The regrets of the late-comers are punishment enough.

But the mercy of God is not weakness; it does not allow any presumptuous calculating indulgence. Jesus taught that people are known by their fruits¹³ and eventually judged according to their fruits.¹⁴ Entrance into the Kingdom of God requires loving God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength, and one's neighbor as oneself.¹⁵ This is no small task, as the rich young man discovered when some of the

¹⁰Lk. 15:11-32.

¹¹Lk. 19:1-10.

¹²Matt. 20:1-15.

¹³Matt. 12:33; Lk. 6:43-45.

¹⁴Matt. 25:31-46, 7:21-23; Lk. 6:46-49.

¹⁵Mk. 12:28-33; Matt. 22:34-40; Lk. 10:25-28.

implications were pointed out to him and prescribed for him.¹⁶ Although it is our "Father's good pleasure to give . . . [us] the kingdom,"¹⁷ the entrance is nevertheless referred to as "narrow" and the "way" as "hard."¹⁸ This does not mean we should limit our forgiveness;¹⁹ rather we are to love even our enemies and "be merciful, even as . . . [our] Father is merciful."²⁰ This is hard! God calls us, but we must make the decision to respond, as the prodigal son did, but as the rich young man did not. There is nothing we can give to God in exchange for our lives--we must give our lives.²¹ We may need to prune our lives,²² but the choice is ours to make. God calls us, but He leaves the final choice up to us. We are called to repent and accept His forgiveness, and live according to His will. By doing this we truly become His sons and reflect His image, and are acceptable in His Kingdom. But the Kingdom of God is not free--the gift must be accepted and assimilated in the heart and then lived.

¹⁶Mk. 10:17-22; Matt. 19:16-22; Lk. 18:18-23.

¹⁷Lk. 12:32.

¹⁸Matt. 7:13-14; cf. Lk. 13:23-24.

¹⁹Matt. 6:12-15; 18:21-22, 23-35; Mk. 11:25; Lk. 17:3-4.

²⁰Lk. 6:27-36; cf. Matt. 5:43-48.

²¹Matt. 16:24-26; Mk. 8:34-37; Lk. 9:23-25.

²²Matt. 18:8-9; Mk. 9:43-48.

And then there is judgment. When first reading the gospels it might seem that Jesus as the Christ is judge. The picture of the last judgment as given in Matthew 25: 31-46 speaks of the Son of man coming in His glory, sitting on His throne, and separating the "sheep" from the "goats." But the sheep are "the blessed of . . . [His] Father," not blessed of the Son.²³ Likewise, Jesus will deny before His Father all those who deny Him.²⁴ Therefore, in whatever sense Jesus serves as judge, it is in the sense of serving as a character witness under God rather than being the final authority in His own right. The writer of the Gospel according to John clearly interpreted Jesus' role in this sense when he wrote as Jesus' words the following:

If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has Himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me.²⁵

In another passage, John did speak of Jesus as saying that "the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to

²³Matt. 25:34.

²⁴Matt. 10:32-33; Lk. 12:8-9; cf. Mk. 8:38; Lk. 9:26.

²⁵John 12:47-50. (This writer considers the Gospel according to John to be primarily an interpretation of the meaning of Jesus and, therefore, not as helpful as the Synoptics in reporting the life and teachings of Jesus. John is referred to here as an interpreter rather than a reporter.)

the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father,²⁶ but this passage is introduced by the comment, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of His own accord, but only what He sees the Father doing; for whatever He does, that the Son does likewise."²⁷ Clearly, any judging Jesus does as the Messiah is done as a servant of God the Father, whose equal He will not presume to be-- He even reacts strongly to being addressed as "good,"²⁸ apparently feeling this quality should be ascribed only to God.

The Nature of Man

Any statement of Jesus' concept of the nature of man must be drawn from the implications of his life and teachings as they reveal his attitudes and beliefs about the nature of man, for Jesus did not discuss the question directly. Nevertheless, a consideration of the implications of his actions and teachings make his concept of man relatively definite and clear.

Jesus thought of man as in some sense akin to God. Jesus prayed to God and taught his disciples to pray to

²⁶ John 5:22-23a.

²⁷ John. 5:19.

²⁸ Mk. 10:17-18; Lk. 18:18-19. Cf Matt. 19:16-17 where the compiler apparently has edited out the ascription of "good" to Jesus, although the more original reading is attested to by the agreement of Mark and Luke and by the compiler of Matthew keeping the words, "One there is who is good." For fuller discussion on this, see below, pp. 133-34.

Him.²⁹ This implies some essential likeness in God and man which makes possible communication of person with Person. This does not imply that man is equal with God or that he can become God, but it does imply that man is in some essential way akin to God. Jesus implied that the essential nature of man is not physical when he stated that after the resurrection, people do not marry ". . . but are like the angels in heaven,"³⁰ and when he warned his disciples not to fear those who can kill the body but not the soul.³¹ Jesus gave us no precise definition of the higher nature of man, but he clearly thought of man as a person in some sense similar in nature to God.

Man is also a being capable of moral responsibility. According to the teachings of Jesus, man is held accountable for his attitudes and conduct--he can give nothing in exchange for the opportunity of life which he may, however, forfeit.³²

²⁹See above, p. 73.

³⁰Mk. 12:24-25; Matt. 22:29-30. Cf. Lk. 20:34-36.

³¹Matt. 10:26-28; cf. Lk. 12:4-5. (The reference Jesus made to cutting off a hand or plucking out an eye that causes a person to sin, so that the person can enter life, even physically maimed if necessary, is surely not to be understood literally, but rather understood as teaching the sacrifice, if necessary, of the physical side of life to the spiritual life. See Matt. 18:8-9; Mk. 9:43-48.)

³²Mk. 8:34-38; Matt. 16:24-26. Cf. Lk. 9:23-26.

Man is to be just,³³ honest,³⁴ and pure.³⁵ This moral responsibility goes much farther than any legalistic letter-of-the-law attitude would suggest; it is an attitude toward God and men which recognizes the inner attitudes as the springs of action. Thus "out of the heart are the issues of life."³⁶ Concerns for legalistic righteousness miss the spirit of the law and indicate a hard heart.³⁷ People are held responsible for their attitudes, not just their outward actions.³⁸ Jesus did not argue whether a person could be excused under certain circumstances; it seems he assumed that a person can respond to God and His will if he wants to. Thus, Zacchaeus responded and made amends and was acceptable for the Kingdom.³⁹ The woman taken in adultery was not condoned in her sin but instructed to go and not sin again.⁴⁰ In this same case, the real purpose of the accusers was recognized to be something other than concern about the woman. The attitude of Jesus was one of understanding and forgiveness after repentance, but people are still to be responsible

³³Matt. 23:23; Lk. 11:42.

³⁴Matt. 5:33-37; James 5:12.

³⁵Matt. 5:8, 21-26, 27-30.

³⁶Matt. 15:1-20; Mk. 7:1-23.

³⁷Mk. 3:1-6.

³⁸Matt. 5:21-26, 27-30, 43-48; Lk. 6:27-36.

³⁹Lk. 19:1-10.

⁴⁰John 8:3-11.

servants, as are all of us, as is clear in the parable of the talents or pounds.⁴¹

As the conclusion to man's being held morally responsible, man is judged eventually--somewhere, somehow, there is a final dividing line. This is clear in Jesus' parables of the last judgment⁴² and the parables on exclusion from the Kingdom.⁴³ There are other references in which Jesus indicated an ultimate judgment: for example, the references to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit,⁴⁴ to the refusal of the invitation to enter the Kingdom,⁴⁵ and to Jesus' response to the request for a sign to authenticate his teaching.⁴⁶ Thus, according to Jesus, men are, in some sense, and have some potential for becoming, sons of God;⁴⁷ men are held morally responsible for responding in love to God's love and will, and are eventually judged accordingly. Jesus did not say anything about original sin and did not propose to atone for it, but Jesus did and does call men in the name of God to accept the Good News of God's love and God's invitation

⁴¹Matt. 25:14-30; Lk. 19:12-27.

⁴²Matt. 25:31-46.

⁴³Matt. 25:1-13; Lk. 13:22-30.

⁴⁴Matt. 12:31-32; Mk. 3:28-30; Lk. 12:10.

⁴⁵Matt. 10:14-16; Lk. 10:8-12.

⁴⁶Matt. 12:38-42; Lk. 11:29-32.

⁴⁷Lk. 20:34-37; cf. Matt. 22:29-30; 5:9, 45.

to enter His Kingdom. Man is free to deny God and reject the invitation but he is not free to escape the consequences of a negative decision, for man is held accountable for the responsible use of his freedom.

The concepts of God and man implied in the life and teachings of Jesus are essentially concepts of a Creator Person and His created persons, who are, in the essential nature of their being, akin to each other. The Creator Person has given His created persons the opportunity to affirm their Creator, but He has also given them the opportunity to deny Him. But the created persons are held accountable for the responsible use and development of the life they have been given by their Creator. Then what is the nature of the freedom of the persons God has created in His image and what are the practical problems involved? This is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

THE NATURE AND PROBLEM OF FREEDOM IN RELIGION

What is freedom in religion? Is it necessary? If freedom in religion is necessary, what are its functions and what purpose or purposes does it serve? What are the dangers of freedom in religion? Can there be freedom in religion? These questions force themselves upon anyone who would consider the problem of authority and freedom in religion. In this chapter we shall discuss the nature of freedom and its inherent limitations, the function and necessity of freedom, and the dangers of freedom in religion. In the following chapter, the necessary limits and function of both authority and freedom and the desirable balance between them will be considered.

The Nature of Freedom

We can hardly begin discussing the nature of freedom without immediately recognizing that man faces inherent limitations. First, man is to a considerable degree a child of nature--he is not free to ignore the laws of nature. Thus a man must eat, sleep, and live with due regard for the force of the attraction of the earth pulling his physical body towards its center. And in our day, we must be especially aware of

the ruling importance of momentum and centrifugal force as we drive high-powered automobiles. As we stand on the threshold of interplanetary travel, we realize that in the near-future the need to breathe may be a very great limitation. And whatever we do to make adjustments to the physical circumstances in which we live--in housing, clothing, diving suits, pressurized planes, and air-conditioned homes, factories and automobiles--we are still limited to a considerable degree by the physical universe in which we have been born and of which at least our bodies are a part.

In his recent book on The Authority of the Biblical Revelation, Cunliffe-Jones speaks of man's freedom as not " . . . the freedom of one who is the sovereign master of existence but the freedom of one who in the first place must accept the reality of the universe for what it is, whether he likes it or not . . . " ¹ Cunliffe-Jones also points out that man " . . . cannot escape his own nature which has been made in the image of God." ² Man's nature is a reality given by God which is determinative for the whole human enterprise. In other words, man cannot help being a man. A man can act as though he is not worthy of manhood, can degrade himself and refuse to utilize the opportunity for growth, but he is still a man, although a poor one. And because a being is a man, a human being, he has some freedom. This is probably

¹Cunliffe-Jones, The Authority . . . , p. 18.

²Ibid., p. 19.

what Russell J. Clinchy, former minister of the First Church of Christ in Hartford, Connecticut, means when he states that freedom " . . . is the real meaning of human nature . . . " ³

In discussing "The Christian View of Man and the Meaning of Freedom and Authority in Education," J. Donald Butler of Princeton Theological Seminary remarks that, since man is a creature, he is limited by his subjection to his creator, and that unlimited freedom would be " . . . a contradiction of creaturehood . . . " ⁴ Butler also thinks that " . . . freedom cannot be defined as the relinquishment of initiative . . . " nor as the " . . . unlimited power of initiative . . . " ⁵ The nature of man's freedom is such that he must exercise it in his response to it.

Any concept of freedom also includes some possibility of choice. The degree of choice may be limited, and thereby the degree of freedom limited, but without some opportunity for choice that makes a difference in the ensuing events and experiences, the concept of freedom would be an illusion. For freedom to be a reality, there must be alternatives to

³Russell J. Clinchy, Faith and Freedom (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 46. (The Enoc Pond Lectures on Applied Christianity at Bangor Theological Seminary, Jan. 1946, comprise this book.)

⁴Butler, Religious Education, XLVIII (Nov.-Dec., 1953), 399.

⁵Ibid.

choose between. Randolph Crump Miller even asserts that ". . . authority presupposes freedom as basic to its existence."⁶ He speaks of freedom as independence ". . . of an arbitrary, external power," and states: "It is freedom to believe or not to believe, to accept or not to accept, to interpret in one way or another any given doctrine."⁷ He speaks of authority operating ". . . through the sense of obligation, being moral persuasion."⁸ Here is limitation of freedom, although on a high level. Peter A. Bertocci, Professor of Philosophy at Boston University, thinks that ". . . man is a creature whose nature exerts itself in the demand for, the imperative to, the best of which he is capable, given his needs and abilities and environment."⁹ Bertocci thinks a person is free to choose less than the best, but if he does choose less than his best, his nature asserts itself, and "he feels guilt and this gnaws at him, keeps him discontented, in a way differing from whatever anxiety he may feel."¹⁰ Here is a basic limitation upon absolute freedom;

⁶R. C. Miller, The Clue . . . , p. 172

⁷Ibid., pp. 171-72.

⁸Ibid., p. 172.

⁹Peter A. Bertocci, Free Will, Responsibility, and Grace (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 59. (This book is in essence the lectures Bertocci delivered to the Montreat faculty conference at Montreat, North Carolina, Aug. 27-31, 1956, which was sponsored jointly by the Board of Education of the Methodist Church and the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.)

¹⁰Ibid.

a man must live with himself and his conscience. He must choose whether to accept his conscience as at least a subordinate authority, or whether he will choose some other authority. Thus man's freedom is a limited freedom to choose what he will accept as his authority.¹¹ He must give his loyalty to some cause, institution, or person, even if it is he himself. But here again a person must choose between what he thinks are the best interests of his self and his desires. He cannot even reject his freedom because he has to choose what to do with it, even if one possible alternative is renouncing it. Sabatier points out this same problem when he analyzes liberty and the moral and religious consciousness. He writes that "to be free is not to be without law, it is to obey the law of one's being; servitude is subjection to that of another."¹² Reinhold Niebuhr carries this type of thinking even farther when he asserts that ". . . it is not within the province of the human spirit to choose qualified goals in order to escape the intolerable tension of the unqualified."¹³ But when a person tries this stratagem, the outcome is that "every such effort merely results in transmuting some qualified

¹¹Herman J. Heering refers to the same idea when he writes that man's freedom ". . . is always a choice of authority; not an autonomy to create but to choose which authority he will accept and confess. "The Meaning of Authority and Autonomy for Modern Man," The Congregational Quarterly, XXXIV (Jan., 1956), 23.

¹²Sabatier, p. 320.

¹³Reinhold Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1935), p. 69.

end . . . into an unqualified one."¹⁴ Truly man must make choices about ultimate goals--even if the choice is passive.

But how is God involved in human freedom and how does He deal with man in regard to it? We have already recognized that man is a creature and limited by his physical nature. We have also recognized that man feels the pull of his higher nature and cannot escape it. Accepting God as creator of life, with will and purpose for life as stated in the previous chapter, it follows that whatever freedom man has is ultimately given by God. But here there are two kinds of freedom: first, the freedom to deny and reject God, and, second, the freedom which comes from release from sin through the active spiritual power of God. Clinchy asserts that "the liberal Christian faith accepts the freedom of man, granted by God, with all the possibilities of good and evil, but with the certainty of the presence of God operating within the life of man . . . "¹⁵ The implication of this is that God has given man the freedom of choice between good and evil, but God is still both in and above the process--He will nurture us in the desirable use of our freedom, or reject us ultimately if we persist in the undesirable use of it. Edwin Lewis, recently retired Professor of Systematic Theology at Drew Theological Seminary, asserts that "the price paid for being a man is the possession of the

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Clinchy, p. 42.

right to vote--and to vote against God."¹⁶ Lewis also speaks of God's "frustration at the hands of men," and states that God ". . . seeks not to overwhelm but to persuade," and ". . . calls, knowing that he may not be heeded."¹⁷ John C. Bennett speaks of "the risks of freedom, of the freedom to be wrong, the importance of enabling persons to come to see the truth for themselves, from their own insight . . . " as ". . . God's way of dealing with men."¹⁸ In Bennett's thinking, "God in his own dealings with men has avoided the overwhelming of their minds and consciences by His power, even in the interests of His truth or of their salvation."¹⁹ This is a radical limitation on the part of God, yet it seems true to life with its necessity of choices and contradictory claims to allegiance to various interpretations of the meaning of life and the will of God. Randolph Crump Miller even writes that ". . . God's 'love is the power to grant freedom without desiring to limit or inhibit its exercise.'"²⁰ But this goes too far. "There'll be a price to pay." God has neither abdicated nor retired. He both limits the possibility of man abusing his freedom with

¹⁶ Edwin Lewis, The Biblical Faith and Christian Freedom (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 49.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ John C. Bennett, "The Christian Response to Social Revolution," The Ecumenical Review, IX (Oct., 1956), 7.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Randolph Crump Miller, Biblical Theology and Christian Education (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 89.

impunity and desires that man inhibit his irresponsible use of his freedom. There is judgment. It may be that we with our limited knowledge and understanding do not know for sure what God will do in a particular situation, as Leslie Zeigler suggests in her recent dissertation,²¹ but we do know that Jesus assured us we could depend upon God. If we cannot know just how God's purpose will be expressed in a particular situation, we can nevertheless know the principle and loving concern that will be in it and guide it.

This leads us to consideration of the freedom which comes with man's positive response to God and His love and will for our lives--the freedom from being bound by evil and sin. Let us recognize with R. H. Strachan, Emeritus Professor of New Testament Language and Literature, Westminster College, Cambridge, that the original initiative in this is with God, although God's initiative must wait upon man's positive response before man can be given this side of his freedom.²² This is really the freedom that is implied in Jesus' statement that whoever loses his life for the sake of Christ and the gospel will find it.²³ A. Gabriel Hebert calls attention to St. Paul as an example of this side of Christian freedom and states its positive aspects as follows:

²¹Leslie Zeigler, "The Nature of the Spiritual Person, a Christian Ontology" (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Pacific School of Religion, 1957), p. 400.

²²Strachan, p. 20.

²³Mk. 8:34-35; cf. Matt. 16:24-25; Lk. 9:23-24.

Christian freedom is the condition of having been set free, or liberated. It is not a matter merely of the freedom of the will to act as the will chooses; but of the setting free of the man to do the things that he would always have been glad to do, if only he could. He was impotent, the slave of his desires and lusts; now by the grace of God a new power has come to his will, and he is set free, so that he comes to be progressively in control of his life, and able to rule his desires.

.....
Here is an entire freedom, a freedom of the man to be himself, and exercise control over his whole life; and this freedom depends on the surrender of himself to God to whom he belongs. . . . where obedience is given to the Lord God, then he is finally free.²⁴

Here is a freedom which comes from positive, responsible use of the freedom which God has given us to reject Him. By its nature, it is still limited by the limits of our capabilities and understanding, yet it is a very positive freedom to live on the Christian spiritual plane. There is, however, a realistic limitation in that the practical experience of the Church through the centuries has been that even this freedom can be thrown away or lost. Many of Paul's pastoral letters are testimony to this, as well as the common experience of the continuing temptation to desire and do evil, and to live below the spiritual plane upon which we thought we had been firmly established.

In A Treatise on Christian Liberty, Martin Luther reasons that a Christian is justified only by faith and therefore is freed from sin and the law of works, whether this law be stated in the Old Testament sense or in the sense of the Roman Catholic Church of his day. Luther sums up his

²⁴A. Gabriel Hebert, "Authority and Freedom," Anglican Theological Review, XXXI (Oct., 1949), 211.

treatment of liberty with this comment:

Enough now of liberty. As you see, it is a spiritual and true liberty, and makes our hearts free from all sins, laws and mandates, as Paul says, 1 Timothy 1, "The law is not made for a righteous man." It is more excellent than all other liberty which is external, as heaven is more excellent than earth. This liberty may Christ grant us both to understand and to preserve. Amen.²⁵

Luther follows this statement with a warning against turning this liberty into license, which of course would be a basic misunderstanding of what he meant.²⁶

Similarly, in considering the question of Christian liberty, John Calvin is speaking of liberty from the standpoint of the elected Christian. Thus he thinks of Christians being "above the law" and freed from the claims of the law.²⁷ This freedom from obligation to the law Calvin thinks expresses itself in Christian consciences which ". . . yield a voluntary obedience to the will of God."²⁸ Calvin also considers that Christians ". . . are bound by no obligation before God respecting external things, which in themselves are indifferent;

²⁵Martin Luther, A Treatise on Christian Liberty, trans. W. A. Lambert and reprinted with minor revisions, from the Philadelphia (Holman) edition (6 vols.) of the Works of Martin Luther, with the title, Three Treatises (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1943), pp. 283-84.

²⁶Ibid., p. 284.

²⁷John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. II, trans. John Allen from the Latin and Collated with the author's last edition in French, 7th American ed., revised and corrected (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), p. 77.

²⁸Ibid., p. 79.

but that . . . [Christians] may indifferently sometimes use, and at other times omit them."²⁹

Freedom of any other kind Calvin denies in his doctrine of predestination. As, of course, is common knowledge, this doctrine asserts that God once and for all determined whom He would elect for salvation and to whom he would give no opportunity to be saved.³⁰ Even when God elects a group or a nation, as in the case of Israel, and only a remnant are saved, Calvin thinks it is because ". . . the general election of a people is not always effectual and permanent . . ." since ". . . when God covenants with them, he does not also give them the spirit of regeneration to enable them to persevere in the covenant to the end . . ."³¹ In addition, Calvin even seems to mean that some people are elected without the possibility of a choice to reject their selection, for he writes that God's

²⁹Ibid., p. 81.

³⁰Ibid., p. 181. A concise statement of Calvin's doctrine reads as follows: "In conformity, therefore, to the clear doctrine of the Scripture, we assert, that by an eternal and immutable counsel, God has once for all determined, both whom he would admit to salvation, and whom he would condemn to destruction. We affirm that this counsel, as far as concerns the elect, is founded on his gratuitous mercy, totally irrespective of human merit; but that to those whom he devotes to condemnation, the gate of life is closed by a just and irreprehensible, but incomprehensible, judgment."

³¹Ibid., p. 180.

". . . gratuitous election is but half displayed till we come to particular individuals, to whom God not only offers salvation, but assigns it in such a manner, that the certainty of the effect is liable to no suspense or doubt."³²

With this doctrine of predestination, this writer must take serious issue. However, the discussion of this issue will be limited since, as Rupert E. Davies, Chaplain of Kingswood School, points out ". . . the doctrine of Predestination has been gradually abandoned."³³ It should be noted that Calvin's use of the Bible is unjustifiable in the light of modern knowledge and study. In his listing of Biblical references in support of his doctrine, he refers to various passages of Scripture without any regard for varying levels of inspiration and validity. It is significant here that Calvin almost never quotes from the Synoptic Gospels. In fact, in his first chapter on the subject, titled "Eternal Election, or God's Predestination of Some to Salvation, and of Others to Destruction,"³⁴ Calvin makes no reference to any passage of Scripture in any of the Synoptic Gospels. Furthermore, in his following chapter, titled "Testimonies of Scripture in Confirmation of This

³²Ibid., pp. 179-80.

³³Rupert E. Davies, The Problem of Authority in the Continental Reformers: A Study in Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin (London: The Epworth Press, 1946), p. 93.

³⁴Calvin, pp. 170-81.

Doctrine,"³⁵ Calvin also makes no reference to any of the Synoptic Gospels. He does refer repeatedly to the Gospel according to John, and to the books of Romans, Deuteronomy, and Psalms. In our day, with the results of Biblical research before us, it is not fair to accept as Christian doctrine statements which ignore and contradict the earliest and most original records we have concerning the teachings of Jesus. Of course, we should remember that Calvin was to a considerable degree a child of his time, and others, especially in the Protestant Reformation, used the Bible much as he did. However, this should not bind us to the limitations which we surely would have experienced had we lived at the same time. We should be open to new truth, especially new evidence and truth about the Bible and its origins and meanings.

Another major objection to Calvin's doctrine of predestination is that it is directly contradictory to the teachings of Jesus concerning the nature of God and His will that all should be saved.³⁶ In addition, Calvin's doctrine of predestination contradicts Jesus' teaching that God is loving, forgiving, dependable, and better than the best human parent.³⁷ It is, therefore, very understandable that

³⁵Ibid., 182-98.

³⁶Above, p. 73.

³⁷Calvin, pp. 182-98.

Calvin's doctrine of predestination has not stood the test of Christian thought since his time.

The Function and Necessity of Freedom in Religion

Why should a man be free? What function does the opportunity of freedom make possible that would otherwise be lacking in religion? In answer we can say that considerable freedom is necessary for the Christian growth which leads to mature Christian personality and life. We need freedom because of the stimulus to thought and action which the making of choices forces upon us. Sabatier expresses this by saying we should not have "an external infallible authority" because "in our religious indolence we would have abdicated and taken refuge in it," and then we would be "inert spirits" which God does not want.³⁸ Similarly, W. Earl Biddle of the Philadelphia State Hospital writes in his Integration of Religion and Psychiatry that "forced change" is "obnoxious and oppressive" even though it may be in the right direction.³⁹ Thus, it does not bring growth but resistance, although a person may outwardly acquiesce. The necessity of freedom which will allow growth to be normal is well stated by Blanche Carrier when she points out the crippling personality patterns which come

³⁸Sabatier, p. 263.

³⁹Biddle, p. 156.

from reactions to authority. She lists the aggressive, the submissive, the vacillating, and the withdrawn. She recognizes the good in a reasonable degree of both aggressiveness and submissiveness but comments on the withdrawn personality pattern as the "most unfortunate" and the "most ineffectual" of all.⁴⁰ Furthermore, she notes that "the largest number of mental breakdowns occurs in this withdrawn group."⁴¹ In the extreme cases, the possibility of religious growth has been effectively blocked by the authoritarianism which precipitated the violent and unstable reactions. Randolph Crump Miller recognizes the same need when he writes: "For the child to grow, there must be real freedom to reject authority."⁴² But there are many elements and aspects of Christian growth which need special attention.

First, a person must be free to take the responsibility for his own soul. If he does not have this opportunity, then he cannot be held responsible, even though he may have lost the opportunity for growth in the Christian life. Some of those in the groups mentioned by Carrier may well be in this category. If a person does not have the opportunity to take the responsibility for his own soul in some degree, then he cannot grow. The moral decisions which all of us must

⁴⁰Carrier, pp. 18-19.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 19.

⁴²R. C. Miller, The Clue . . ., p. 64.

make repeatedly stimulate our growth, and we cannot delegate these decisions to anyone else. Robert L. Calhoun takes the same position when he states: "I cannot entrust to any fellow-man nor to any beloved community my responsibility for moral decision."⁴³ The opinions of others may help us, but the decision has to be ours. It is well that life forces decisions upon us, because otherwise we would give our freedom away by the delegation of responsibility for our moral decisions. It is also necessary that children learn to make their own moral decisions because they have to learn to think for themselves. R. C. Miller points this up arrestingly when he calls attention to religiously divided homes, homes where there has been divorce, and homes where relatives of different religious backgrounds interfere.⁴⁴ For a person to grow and mature in such a situation, he must learn to think and decide for himself.

Second, religious freedom is necessary for the enrichment of the understanding of religious truth. There is much truth that we do not understand or appreciate because we have not gone through the experiences which give it meaning for us. This is not to suggest that every possible act should be indulged in so we would know why some are not desirable, but rather that, where possible and advisable,

⁴³Calhoun, "Christ and the Church," p. 2.

⁴⁴Randolph Crump Miller, "Bobby-Sox Religion," Religious Education, XLI (1946), 107-108.

first-hand experience should be sought as an aid to understanding and growth. For example, it is hard to realize what it is like to be a stranger until one has himself been a stranger. It is hard to realize what it feels like to be a member of a minority racial group till one has been in such a situation. This writer will never forget his experience in a rather remote section of Mexico when he suddenly realized one day that he was the only light-skinned person in a crowd. Likewise, if we have not faced the problem of religious doubt, we do not understand others who have religious doubts, and we do not really understand what faith is. In the process of the free study of the various religious doctrines and claims, we have the opportunity to come to understand the real purpose and meaning of the various doctrines. It is when we have investigated as fairly as possible the claims for agnosticism and atheism, as well as the claims for the validity of Christianity, that we appreciate and understand more fully what Christian faith is and means.

In this same spirit of free inquiry, Thouless suggests that ". . . even the central affirmation of religious faith, 'I believe in God' may be profitably accompanied by the exploration of the possibility that this affirmation may be wrong."⁴⁵ Thouless also suggests that "the man who has never

⁴⁵Thouless, p. 112.

considered the possibility of the opposite is in a somewhat precarious state of balance which may be upset by any presentation . . . of the case against religious belief."⁴⁶ But by the consideration of opposing views, a person may be both forearmed and strengthened in his own religious understanding. We should not ignore that there are some dangers here, for some people of Christian background may possibly decide against belief in God when they consider the opinions against such belief. But when this happens, it often suggests that the earlier religious foundation was poor and could not stand the light of honest inquiry. Also, there may be some who honestly think, after careful consideration, that belief in God is untenable. We should at least respect their sincerity and integrity. We should also keep in mind that when claims for non-belief are being considered, along with them claims for the most intelligent religious positions should also be considered. It sometimes happens that people become acquainted with the latest scientific knowledge and philosophical thinking but do not become acquainted with the growing edges of religious research and thought, and the contest is one-sided and unfair. Let the free inquiry be made, but let it also include the best thinking on all sides. This writer has seen the unfortunate results with university students when this has not been done, and the good results when it has been done.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 113.

Third, and closely related to the enrichment of religious understanding coming from freedom to inquire into the basis and meaning of religious truths, is the value of discovering new truth--we could say the discovery of God's truth, for any new truth, as well as any old truth, is God's truth. Freedom of inquiry into the basis and meaning of religious doctrines may help us come to new understanding of old truth, and to an understanding of new truth which had not been seen before. For example, the new understanding of the Bible and its origins which has come from freedom of inquiry and research has helped us to see the Bible as a record of God's revelation and man's religious response. Had there been no freedom of inquiry in matters of religion, this would not have been possible. Harold A. Bosley refers to ". . . the freedom of a new idea or institution to win a following at the expense of accepted ideas and existing institutions."⁴⁷ This is of the essence of religious freedom, else we are bound completely by the conclusions of our ancestors, and even perhaps by our own earlier conclusions. G. Bromley Oxnam thinks that man cannot even use his mind and reason to know "the revealed will of God" unless he lives in freedom. "Freedom is essential if he would lay hold upon the truth that brings greater freedom."⁴⁸ Freedom to grow

⁴⁷Bosley, p. 150.

⁴⁸Oxnam, p. 88.

necessarily includes freedom to seek and discover new truth-- God's truth.

Fourth, freedom to grow religiously includes freedom to restate and refine old statements of truth. To deny this freedom would be to imply that previous statements of truth were completely true. But by the very nature of human existence, men of all ages are limited to statements of truth as they best understand truth. As new knowledge becomes available, we must be free to test it and follow out its implications for our thinking and beliefs. Only thus can we grow in our understanding of God's world and our place in it. Only thus has it been possible to see that instead of destroying belief in the Bible and God's Word, scientific discovery about the origin and age of our earth and the life of man and other life upon it has forced us to a truer understanding of truth about the universe, the Bible, and how God has created and is creating them. The problem is not that truth changes, but that man's understanding of it changes in the light of his knowledge and experiences. Sabatier recognizes this when he states that "the new truth discovered by free inquiry is older and more venerable than the most venerable authority."⁴⁹ Thus, it follows that free inquiry is both a right and a duty, for truth needs always to be stated according to our best insights and with relevance to the life of each age.

⁴⁹Sabatier, p. xxviii.

Fifth, an important result of freedom of inquiry in matters of religion is almost a by-product, yet we may value it as a very positive result of freedom of inquiry. This is the recognition of the right of honest conclusion even though it be held by a minority of one. Once it is recognized that no statement of truth is absolutely true, or tells the whole truth, then there must follow the recognition that people may honestly differ in their understandings of and statements about truth and yet must mutually respect each other. This writer has seen this happen in a state university as a result of free inquiry study in a class which he was teaching on the life and teachings of Jesus. The attempt was continually made in the class to leave the students free to draw their own conclusions. Students of various religious backgrounds were in the class and it was only natural there would be different opinions expressed. The discussion on whether Jesus was of virgin birth was conducted by listing on the blackboard all the reasons and opinions pro and con that members of the class and the instructor had ever read, seen, or heard. Then these were evaluated in open discussion with the opinions and implications related to each claim. No attempt was made to tell the students what they should think or to try to get them to agree. Several weeks later an older student commented to the instructor one day before class: "When I came into this class, I couldn't see how a person could be a Christian and not believe in the Virgin Birth;

now I can. I still believe in it, but I can see how a person could be a Christian and not believe in it." Here the experience and understanding that had come from honest and free consideration of the various claims and points of view had resulted in the development of understanding and respect for a position contrary to the student's own position on a very controversial doctrine.

Randolph Crump Miller writes that one of the reasons for freedom ". . . is to make room for honest difference of opinion, so that members of the Churches may say to each other, 'in things essential, unity; in things doubtful, liberty; in all things, charity.'"⁵⁰ It is to be hoped the charity would also include charity for those who hold different opinions even on "things essential." If not, then the problem has not really been faced. It is comparatively easy to be charitable toward another person's beliefs when they are different from one's own if one does not feel sure about the matter himself, or thinks it really does not make much difference anyway. But when another person both holds and argues strongly for a view contradictory to one's own on a doctrine one holds to be absolutely essential, then it is very difficult to be charitable. The understanding of another's reasons and why he has come to his particular conclusion may at least help us to be charitable and respect another person's honesty.

⁵⁰R. C. Miller, The Clue . . ., p. 175.

But we must go further than mutual respect for difference of opinion and include the recognition of the right of each person to think for himself and draw his own conclusions. If each man is primarily responsible for his own life, then we cannot legitimately deny him the right to think for himself and come to what he thinks are the justified conclusions. From this vantage point, it is worthwhile looking at the position of Robert Ingersoll, who reasoned as follows:

Standing in the presence of the Unknown, all have the same right to think . . . All I claim, all I plead for, is liberty of thought and expression. . . . I do not pretend to tell what is absolutely true, but what I think is true. I do not pretend to tell all the truth.

. . . I simply claim that what ideas I have, I have a right to express; and that any man who denies that right to me is an intellectual thief and robber.⁵¹

Ingersoll also made an indirect challenge to the churches when he wrote:

If all will admit that all have an equal right to think, then the question is forever solved; but as long as organized and powerful churches, pretending to hold the keys of heaven and hell, denounce every person as an outcast and criminal who thinks for himself and denies their authority, the world will be filled with hatred and suffering.⁵²

Many a Christian leader today could claim such a creed as his own; perhaps the results of free inquiry into church history and the Bible have helped bring this result.

Sixth, freedom is necessary for creativity. If there is any freedom of choice at all, then the future is

⁵¹Ingersoll, The Gods, and Other Lectures, Part I, pp. 331-332.

⁵²Ibid., Part II, p. 15.

in some degree determined by the choices made. Therefore, at least in some degree, man creates the future, as Bertocci states.⁵³ In this same way, man chooses the self he will be. This does not mean that a person is free to do just anything, but where there is the opportunity for moral choice, his choice is to that degree determinative of the self to be and in that sense he is creative and a fellow creator with God. For this is ultimately what freedom means, the freedom to create or to destroy. This freedom to be creative is necessary for the growth of the Christian person. Thus Bertocci states: "... the delegated creativity of man becomes the crucial source of good and evil for both God and man."⁵⁴

Seventh, freedom is necessary as a firm foundation for nonauthoritarian authority. Clinchy asserts that "only a return to . . . faith in the ability of free men to form a community in which authority rests upon the consent of the governed can grant any meaning to the intellectual and spiritual life of man . . ."⁵⁵ This is another way of stating that freedom is necessary for the Christian development of a person, but it also states the case for democratic authority within the Christian community in a new way. The claim here really is that man has his responsibility for himself direct from God and that any authority within the

⁵³Bertocci, p. 29.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 87.

⁵⁵Clinchy, p. 25.

Church is delegated by individuals within the Church. Thus teaching and preaching authority in the sense of responsible servants might be delegated, but the source of the authority to carry out such functions is God through the members of the Christian community. In such a view, the authority of a teacher or preacher would be conditional upon responsible use of his authority--he would be responsible to the members of the Christian community. This is really a statement of the free church position, and it brings us to consideration of the dangers of freedom.

From this discussion of the necessity and function of freedom in religion, it appears that freedom is necessary for the maximum growth of the Christian personality, and that to make this growth possible, a man needs the freedom to take the responsibility for his own soul. This freedom brings with it the possibility of the enrichment of the understanding of truth, of the discovery of new truth, and the refined statement of old truth. This freedom to think and inquire may also bring the recognition of the right of honest conclusion and difference of opinion and, therefore, make creativity possible. Furthermore, the freedom which allows people to take the responsibility for their own thoughts and lives forms in free people the individual character which is the firm foundation for non-authoritarian authority. But are there dangers in freedom in religion? Let us proceed to a consideration of possible

dangers of this freedom.

The Dangers of Freedom in Religion

When we consider the dangers of freedom, we tend to think of what may be lost which might be gained by the use of authority. From the authoritarian point of view, first among these possible losses would be the loss of sound doctrine. If the whole truth, and only what is true, had been handed down in doctrine and dogma, this argument would bear considerable weight. But when it is seen that any statement of truth is always relative, this argument loses its strength. This does not mean that the doctrines and dogmas handed down to us should be approached with condescension and disrespect, but rather that they should be studied to understand their origins and the meaning they had for those who phrased them. Then doctrines and dogmas could be understood in the light of the circumstances in which they were developed and the needs they were intended to meet. Then we would be in a position to compare them with the best we know and can discover concerning the real message and meaning of Christianity. Thus, whatever danger there is of the corruption of doctrine brings with it what is even more important--the opportunity and possibility of refining doctrine and stating it in terms relevant to our needs and understanding.

Second, a closely connected danger is that people may become uncertain, bewildered, and insecure if doctrine

is questioned and critically considered. The cause of these results lies partly in the authoritarian religious training and experience of many people in the past. If a person has been taught and has accepted the view that certain doctrines should not be questioned, then he may feel insecure when such a doctrine is critically examined. Thus, if a person has been taught that the Bible is verbally inspired and can contain no contradictions, then the suggestion that the Bible is not infallible will tend to make him feel insecure. Further, if a person has been taught that the only alternatives are the inerrancy of the whole Bible or no inspiration and dependability in the Bible, he may become severely disturbed if he begins to consider seriously the possibility that the Bible is fallible. Then, unless he gets help in the form of possible other alternatives which include a vital and positive doctrine of inspiration of the Bible, it is probable that he will either reject all critical examination of the Bible or reject the Bible, and with it his religion. This danger is real and important, but when a person with such an authoritarian and literalist background has the opportunity to study the Bible in freedom and honesty, and with live alternatives other than complete rejection or unreasoning acceptance, the person often sees truth for himself and makes the necessary adjustments in his thinking.

It is true that critical examination and questioning

of religious doctrines and beliefs tends to make a person feel insecure. This is understandable because the nature of religion is such that it includes a person's views and beliefs about the meaning of life and how life should be lived. Also, vitality is not composed of hesitating decisions and actions. We cannot, as we might say, stop on our journey and re-study the whole question because we necessarily must continue living on some basis at the same time. When the basis upon which we are building and living our lives is being questioned by us, of course, we feel insecure. Bertocci especially calls attention to this problem and yet reasons that the risk of the insecurity is necessary. He thinks ". . . that the supremely significant experiences of life are always those which involve the insecurity which is creative freedom."⁵⁶ His justification for this is so well stated it must be quoted. He characterizes the insecurity and uncertainty of life as follows:

. . . it is as if the Maker has said to man:
 "You are alive with your freedom in a universe whose nature is not obvious, whose ways are often bewildering unto despair, and your own path will not be clear even when it comes to the crucial question as to your place in the universe. But if you are to be creative, my own existence and nature, and my purpose, could not be made a matter of cognitive security, beyond question and even serious doubt. . . . But what would our relationship be if it were a thing of outright security? It would be inferior even to a meaningful relation between persons. Our relation must be one of creative trust, and we shall both be involved in the decisions that are made."⁵⁷

⁵⁶Bertocci, p. 31.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 33.

Following this same line of reasoning, Bertocci at another point states that man cannot avoid this insecurity without cutting himself off from his fellowmen and God, and without incurring a consequent ". . . deeper insecurity and the undermining of his moral and religious power."⁵⁸ Insecurity is a part of the necessary experience of man if he is to be protected from the temptation to sit back and enjoy himself and thus lose his life. It is no wonder that in the parable of the rich fool, Jesus pictures God as saying to the rich man who was going to retire and ". . . eat, drink, and be merry," that that night his soul would be required of him.⁵⁹ Sabatier also was aware of the dangers of freedom in religion, but quotes from L. Monod's Le Problème de l'Autorité to the effect that if a man becomes lazy and wants "to believe without believing," he should be made to feel insecure and should lose his assurance.⁶⁰ Thus some insecurity feelings are necessary and can have a beneficial effect.

Third, freedom in matters of religious belief may be considered dangerous because it may bring controversy. Most of us enjoy banter and a good-natured clash of wits, but when real controversy develops, we often become uncomfortable and would prefer not to be present. Controversy

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 109.

⁵⁹Lk. 12:13-21.

⁶⁰Sabatier, p. 276, quoting from L. Monod, Le Problème de l'autorité, 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, [n.d.], p. 125.

is disturbing, and we do not like to be disturbed. Furthermore, controversy among Christians may dramatize to the world the disunity of Christians and, therefore, weaken the message of Christianity. Also, Protestants may feel that controversy among them may call attention to their disunity and weaken them in the eyes of the community and the Roman Catholics. Let us admit that freedom of thought and inquiry in religion does run the risk of controversy. This is true partly because by the very nature of the questions to which religion provides answers, our religious beliefs are important to us, and when anything that really matters to us is challenged, controversy may result. It is a common experience of life that free minds often differ on important issues, including religion. But the way forward is not the removal of the opportunity of freedom, but rather learning to handle our disagreements peacefully and with mutual respect. To attempt to prevent controversy by denying freedom would only make the denial of freedom the point of controversy.

Fourth, controversy in matters of religion can lead to divisiveness. This also is a danger that must be recognized and admitted. Yet the denial of freedom also brings division, as it did in the sixteenth century. When there is freedom to disagree in matters of religion, it naturally follows that there should be freedom to form the organizations and churches deemed necessary and desirable. It is

true that there has been and is much division, yet the ecumenical movement is evidence to the fact that people can in freedom seek unity. It is instructive to notice the agreement that has come in many matters concerning the Bible as a result of the freedom to inquire into its origins. For example, it is now widely agreed by scholars that the compilers of the gospels of Matthew and Luke used Mark as one of their basic sources.⁶¹ Thus, although there was a period of disagreement and divisiveness over this issue, nevertheless the end result is considerable unity.

Fifth, there is the fear that freedom in religion will result in license and anarchy. That this can happen must also be admitted. Nevertheless, this is not a great danger in our day. The small sects tend to become denominations and are not marked by license and anarchy but by seriousness and concern as they understand the Christian message and see their responsibility under God.

Sixth, some people fear there will be real danger that wolves in sheep's clothing may take advantage of freedom in religion to teach error and falsehood. This includes the fear that sound doctrine will be lost if it is not protected by the authority of a person or an

⁶¹It is true that some Roman Catholic scholars, for example Riccotti, still assert that Matthew is the oldest gospel, but the motivation for this is easily understood and is doctrinal rather than scholarly. See Giuseppe Riccotti, The Life of Christ, Trans. Alba I. Zizzamia, D. in L. (Rom.) (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1947), pp. 98-106.

institution. There is the related fear that ignorant people may be the victims of unscrupulous people. Surely there is some danger here--this writer knows of one such case involving a person who posed as a preacher. However, with freedom in religion, there is an inherent check upon false prophets, for the members of a congregation have the opportunity and the responsibility of "testing the spirits." In the case just referred to, this happened and the imposter was found wanting. A part of the basic faith in freedom, and in democracy, is the faith that what is true will win the support of the majority a majority of the time when there is freedom of information, inquiry, and discussion. Thus, to limit freedom in an attempt to limit false teaching would in turn limit discussion and free inquiry, which in turn would limit the search for new truth and the understanding of old truth. And in the process, much of the opportunity and challenge for religious growth would be removed.

We have seen that man is limited by his Creator, and yet that he has and must have some freedom of choice if he is to grow in the image of his Creator. We have seen that there are dangers in freedom, and yet greater dangers in the denial of freedom. Yet freedom brings with it responsibilities which man does not have the freedom to escape. There is authority over man's use of his freedom, but both the freedom and the authority must be limited. In the next chapter we shall consider the necessary limits to both authority and freedom.

CHAPTER V

THE LIMITS OF AUTHORITY AND FREEDOM IN RELIGION

It should already be clear from the previous discussion that neither authority nor freedom can be exercised without dangers being involved. Another way of stating it would be to say that the exercise of both authority and freedom require responsibility. Neither authority nor freedom is absolute. Each authority must be limited, and each freedom must be limited, by something. The ultimate authority is God, and yet in our experience of His authority, we need to check our experience with the experiences of others, lest we be deluded and misled by our desires and limited experience. Our freedom must be limited by the needs and freedom of others, lest we harm them. Thus the real limits for both authority and freedom are the needs of the individual for the conditions and opportunities which will conduce and challenge people to Christian growth in the image of God. Any authority which attempts to limit this is unjustified. This is why Gordon Kaufman, Assistant Professor of Religion at Pomona College, points out that "it is the acceptance of finite authorities

that stultifies man's freedom and may become a source of evil in human affairs, not the acceptance of the authority of God."¹ It is the very authority of God that gives man his freedom, and he should not accept, without some reserve and power of oversight, any authority over him that he cannot evaluate in the light of his ultimate loyalty to the best he knows and understands of God and His will.

The need of balance between freedom and authority in religion is well expressed by J. Donald Butler in his article on "The Christian View of Man and the Meaning of Freedom and Authority in Education."² Here the need for dominance of the religious community over its young and new members is clearly recognized, along with the need for freedom to explore and examine. Butler recognizes the need for a religious community to pass on its heritage, although it is not a "fixed and final fund." Therefore, in the nurture of the young, dominance is necessary, but it must be balanced by the needs of the young to ". . . taste and see, examine, evaluate, and decide."³ Butler also writes that "there must be permissiveness sufficient to allow opportunity for truth to be embraced as truth, goodness to be found to be good,

¹Gordon D. Kaufman, "The Ground of Biblical Authority: Six Theses," The Journal of Bible and Religion, XXIV (Jan., 1956), 26.

²Butler, Religious Education, XLVII (Nov.-Dec., 1953), 401.

³Ibid.

and commitment to flower in the life of the soul from its own seed."⁴ We should also add that there must be freedom not to embrace what the community considers to be truth and to deny the validity of the community's decision as to what is good. But this freedom to deny the truth and good as seen by the community is necessarily balanced by the freedom of the community not to accept such a person as a member of that religious community any longer. This is a very difficult problem if the person who denies the truth and good accepted by the Christian community which has nurtured him and yet makes a positive claim to a different understanding of Christian truth and good which he accepts. It is here that mutual forbearance and love must be practiced even though there is great difference in doctrinal belief. Where a person has not only rejected a particular statement of Christian truth and good, but any positive allegiance to Christianity in any form, then such a person has automatically left the Christian community and should not expect to be heard in the Christian community except upon invitation. He should not be persecuted, but neither should he expect to be considered a member of the Christian community any longer.

Third, the liberal needs the balance between authority and freedom as well as any other person. A person may hold what he considers to be a liberal theological position and be very unliberal in his attitudes in teaching it. Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson call attention to this

⁴Ibid.

very problem in theological schools where it is so easy for a school to become identified with one theological position and make it practically impossible for students to become acquainted with and examine other opinions. As they point out, ". . . the 'dogmatic stance' in theological education is not confined to those who hold one of the traditional theological positions."⁵ It should be added that this problem is not limited to theological schools, but concerns our local churches and ministers as well.

Fourth, the need for organization continually thrusts this problem of relative amounts of freedom and authority to the fore. As Stow Persons remarks in his book on Unitarianism: "Individualistic though they were, these Unitarian radicals felt the need of organization, both for moral support and for the dissemination of their ideas."⁶ Wherever people live and associate themselves together, there is need for organization to carry out the desires and meet the needs of all concerned. This happened in the first Christian community when it was soon deemed necessary to appoint people to take responsibility for overseeing the distribution of food among the members.⁷ The real problem comes to the fore, however, when those who are appointed claim the right to administer their office

⁵Niebahr, Williams, and Gustafson, p. 136.

⁶Stow Persons, Free Religion: An American Faith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), p. 30.

⁷Acts 6:1-6.

without control by the members of the community. The notorious tendency for men to love power also complicates the problem of keeping freedom and authority in balance. Thus it is necessary to provide democratic checks on all officers and administrators in the Church as well as out. Whenever we delegate authority, we must hold in reserve the right to recall the person who misuses his authority. Therefore, no person should object to freedom of inquiry into the foundation of any office or institution; there must be the freedom to balance the power of authority by the free inquiry into its foundation and function. Thus Strachan characterizes the "supreme religious authority" by writing: "The most compelling authority is that which freely, naturally, and inevitably invites investigation, and says, 'Come and see.'"⁸

In conclusion, let us recognize with Hebert the false paradox of the position that ". . . either we are free to do and think what we like, or we are subject to infallible and coercive authority."⁹ Neither is completely true, but authority and freedom must be balanced so that there is both stability and growth, and so there are checks upon the irresponsible uses of both freedom and authority.

⁸Strachan, p. 228.

⁹Hebert, "Authority and Freedom," Anglican Theological Review, XXXI (Oct., 1949), 216.

PART II

SURVEY AND EVALUATION OF

CLAIMED AUTHORITIES

IN RELIGION

CHAPTER VI

THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is the Word of God. The Bible is the norm for the Christian life. The Bible is the record of the revelation of God. The Bible supplies the sure foundation for faith and order. The Bible is the Word of life. The Bible is a human book and must be interpreted carefully to receive the Word of God in it. The Bible is the verbally inspired, infallible, authoritative Word of God.

Such statements as these are sure to be met as the problem of the authority of the Bible in Protestantism today is considered. The question of the kind and degree of authority of the Bible is one of the most important issues before Protestants and the whole ecumenical movement. As one surveys the developments in the ecumenical movement, especially on the world scene, it is evident that the question of the authority of the Bible is most important. Thus, the January, 1957, issue of The Ecumenical Review includes six articles on various aspects of the Church as it is spoken of, described, and referred to in the New Testament. It is clear what is happening--since we have not been able to agree on a doctrine of the Church, we are going back to the primary document--we are being forced back to the most original sources to check our interpretations. We are appealing to

the evidence within the Bible, and in this particular case, within the New Testament.

The Bible is of key importance in the whole ecumenical movement, and will play an even greater role in the future. The Honolulu Study Group, preparing for the North American Faith and Order Study Conference at Oberlin, Ohio, in 1957, stated its thinking this way: "While there certainly are varying views of the authority and interpretations of the scriptures, it stands in some sense as the final word for all Christians."¹ Speakers at this Oberlin Conference also refer to the Bible as ". . . indispensable as guide to Christian Faith,"² and as ". . . normative for our discipleship and for the life of our separate Churches."³ The action of the Advisory Commission on the Theme of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches in meeting reactions to its provisional statement by Scriptural references to support their statements is also indicative of the importance of the Bible as an authority in the Ecumenical movement and in the Protestant Churches today.⁴

The Bible is also of key importance in the continuing

¹Honolulu Study Group, "Local Church Unity and its Ecumenical Implications," Orientation Paper: Section 5, North American Faith and Order Study Conference, Oberlin, Ohio, Sept., 1957, p. 6.

²Above, p. 13.

³Above, p. 12.

⁴Above, p. 17.

issue between varying degrees of liberalism, conservatism, and fundamentalism. Each person must come to some working decision concerning the authority of the Bible, for he must face the issue repeatedly. When the fundamentalists and some conservatives state that the Bible is the inspired, infallible, authoritative Word of God, as the National Association of Evangelicals states,⁵ they have a very different view of the process of inspiration and the problem of interpretation of the Bible than does a person who thinks that the Bible is a book about God's revelation, and that it is a human book, with no part guaranteed against error.⁶ In the face of these contradictory views, what shall we do with the Bible? The writer's endeavor in this chapter is to evaluate the various claims for the Bible and its authority, point out the difficulties involved, and suggest an approach to the solution of these problems.

First, the Bible is appealed to by the fundamentalists and some conservatives as the inspired, infallible, and authoritative Word of God, as just referred to above. This writer has discussed the question with convinced literalists and with

⁵National Association of Evangelicals, "Statement of Faith," cited in "NAE Marks 15 Years of Ecumenical Effort," Christianity Today, II (Oct. 14, 1957), p. 21.

⁶i.e., John C. Bennett, in a speech before the local Inter-Seminary Movement held in the Chapel of the Great Commission at Pacific School of Religion, Nov. 14, 1957, based on notes taken by the writer who attended the meeting.

members of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, and knows first-hand what is meant; he also went through a period of considerable literalism himself. The position is essentially that the Bible is true from "cover to cover" and therefore every statement and interpretation in the Bible is factually true. The position can be argued with an amazing tenacity in the light of supposedly contradictory evidence from within the Bible itself. Thus, as this writer has seen done, a person may refuse to see two accounts of creation, or two stories of the flood interwoven with different details. Nevertheless, most scholars who have faced the evidence recognize in varying degrees the necessity of evaluating the Bible and choosing which parts and statements are authoritative. This demands some other authority beyond the Bible by which to evaluate the Bible and various parts of it. The liberal would claim that the internal evidence of the Bible itself, illustrated by the two stories of creation, the two flood stories, the differences in detail in the gospels, such as whether the mother of James and John asked Jesus to command that her sons sit at his right and left hand in his kingdom as Matthew states,⁷ or whether James and John themselves asked Jesus to grant that they sit at his left and right in his glory as Mark states⁸--the liberal would claim that these deny from within the doctrine of the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. Thus the appeal is made to the necessity of consistency; it is

⁷Matt: 20:20-22.

⁸Mk. 10:35-37.

a logical impossibility for both creation stories to be factually true. Likewise, if Jesus was born in the home of Mary and Joseph, as Matthew 1:18-2:23 clearly implies, then Mary and Joseph had not come from Nazareth necessitating that Jesus be born in the manger of a stranger because the inn was too crowded, as Luke 2:1-7 states. It is common experience and logical necessity that a person cannot be born in two different places. Thus we appeal to experience as having greater authority than logically contradictory statements about the same event. The claim for the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible breaks upon this rock of common experience and a comparative study of the writings in the Bible.

With the fall of the verbal inspiration theory, the question of the authority of the Bible takes other forms. Appeals are made to the "Living Word" rather than the "written word," to "the Mind of Christ," to the authority of Christ over the Bible, to the New Testament rather than the Old Testament, to "the Gospel" rather than the gospels, and finally to the authority of Christian experience. Let us consider these one by one.

First, since it is accepted that the "written word" is not literally infallible, appeal is made to the "Living Word," as Edwin Lewis does.⁹ By the "Living Word" he means

⁹Lewis, pp. 44-45, 121.

Christ. Therefore he states that the Christian's "fundamental surrender" is to the "Incarnate Word," and therefore "his very faith in the Living Word sets him free from bondage to the written word . . ."¹⁰ On the surface, this is an appeal to Christ, but it involves conceptions either of present guidance by the Holy Spirit, or of some section at least of the Bible as authoritative for one's knowledge of the "Living word." Lewis admits that a person will "time and again . . . have to risk himself on his own judgment," in deciding what part or parts of the written word he will accept.¹¹ He recognizes the support of "the collective judgment of men of like faith," but nevertheless asserts that a Christian may sometimes decide against the world and ". . . even, perchance, against the Church."¹² Thus the real determination of what is authoritative is based on the individual's own judgment and what he is convinced is true and therefore authoritative for him.

Second, appeal may be made to the authority of the New Testament rather than the Bible as a whole, or to the gospels as superior to the other writings in the New Testament, or even to "the Gospel." Thus Otto Piper writes that "it is on the Gospels that the authority of the other portions of the New Testament is established," and he refers to his

¹⁰Ibid., p. 121.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

intentional referring ". . . to the authority of the Gospel" rather than to that of the Bible."¹³ He asserts that ". . . such an approach alone is consonant with the experiential character of faith."¹⁴ This brings us back again to the fact that the experience of the individual is decisive in the determination of what that individual will accept as authoritative. If a person experiences differences between teachings and interpretations in various parts of the New Testament,¹⁵ he very naturally seeks the most original and trustworthy parts of the New Testament. Thus he is driven to the gospels. But his problem is not solved there because of the differences in the gospels. Several irreconcilable differences have already been pointed out¹⁶ and any competent student of the Bible could point out several more. Therefore, the appeal is made to "the Gospel," that is, the real message that Jesus brought. Here the differences in the accounts of the teachings of Jesus have to be considered carefully in an attempt to

¹³Otto A. Piper, "The Authority of the Bible," Theology Today, VI (July, 1949), 167-70.

¹⁴Ibid., 167-68.

¹⁵John Knox asserts clearly there are such differences when he states: "Compare the Synoptic Gospels with John, or Matthew with Paul, or First Peter with Revelation, or James with Romans or Hebrews, or Hebrews and Romans with each other; indeed, compare any two books (or groups of books) by different authors, and you confront a much wider diversity of belief than can be found between almost any two of our modern denominations." See his The Early Church and the Coming Great Church, p. 22.

¹⁶Above, pp. 123-24.

discover what Jesus really meant to be saying. For example, when Jesus referred to the sign of Jonah, did he mean that the sign was the preaching of Jonah, or did Jesus mean to refer to the story of Jonah being swallowed by a big fish and then regurgitated as the sign of Jonah?¹⁷ Or how authentic is the statement that Jesus came to give his life as a ransom, and if he did say these words, what did he mean?¹⁸ Thus the appeal to "the Gospel" still leaves us with the problem of deciding which statement of "the Gospel" should be accepted as valid. The decision can only be made on the basis of experience--experience in study and thought which helps a person face the issues, understand them, and decide what interpretation and statement of "the Gospel" he thinks is the most valid and therefore authoritative and having authority for him. He may depend upon the reasoning and opinions of scholars for help, but the choice of one opinion over another is the individual's choice, and the responsibility for another individual accepting a scholar's statement cannot be shifted completely to the scholar, although the scholar may bear some responsibility. Thus it is clear that even beyond the appeal to "the Gospel" is the bar of the judgment of the individual based upon his experience in study and living.

Third, the appeal to "the mind of Christ" as made

¹⁷Cf. Lk. 11:29-32 and Matt. 12:38-42.

¹⁸Cf. Lk. 22:24-27; Mk. 10:35-45; and Matt. 20:23-28. Cf. also Lk. 22:17-23; Mk. 14:22-25; and Matt. 26:26-29.

by Randolph Crump Miller is very similar to the appeal to "the Gospel." According to Miller, the authority of Holy Scripture is supreme when "interpreted by the concept of 'the mind of Christ.'"¹⁹ He thinks that "the authority of the Bible is always in terms of the Bible-as-interpreted-by-groups-of-individuals," and recognizes that "there needs to be a point of reference by which the ethical principles of the Bible may be evaluated" ²⁰ He sees ". . . the focal point of Jesus Christ as seen in 'the mind of Christ'" as offering ". . . the best available information, for it at least has the objective validity of the teachings of Jesus as found in the Synoptic Gospels."²¹ As was discussed in connection with the previous point, "the objective validity of the teachings of Jesus as found in the Synoptic Gospels" is not as simple as this statement would imply. But Miller recognizes that the individual must make his own choices, although he needs the guidance of the thinking of others to guard him against being misled by "absolutizing his own ideas." Miller states the responsibility of the individual as follows: "The individual, with his own faith, makes his own choices between the possibilities opened to him by the Bible, the Church, and his own experiences."²²

¹⁹R. C. Miller, The Clue, p. 170.

²⁰Ibid., p. 139.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

However, Miller then proceeds to suggest that the individual's conscience ". . . is even less likely to be reliable than the Bible or the Church."²³ It follows, therefore, that the individual should consult the Church and the Bible, "which are not infallible either."²⁴ This recognizes the problem that all ethics are relative. Miller is dealing with the problem of ethics at this point, but his discussion is illustrative of the same problem in relation to Christian doctrine. There is no authority greater than the authority of experience, including an individual's experience of the experience and thinking of others. Even the appeal to "the mind of Christ" has to face the problem of the individual's interpretation of what "the mind of Christ" is. Again, the individual must decide upon the basis of experience, including his own experience of the experience of others.

This discussion does not mean to suggest that the Bible has no authority because it cannot be proved infallible. Neither is it intended that there is no value in the attempts to get to the heart of the Gospel. The Bible contains the primary documents of the Christian faith and as such contains the most authoritative evidence of what the first and second generations of Christians thought and taught as the Gospel. From the previous discussion it should be clear that these

²³Ibid., p. 140.

²⁴Ibid.

thoughts and teachings, and even the reports of the words of Jesus, need to be examined carefully to determine the most valid meanings and interpretations. Barth speaks of the Bible as ". . . a serious witness of the revelation of God . . ." ²⁵ That is what it really is. However, the late Harrison S. Elliott, formerly Professor and Head of the Department of Religious Education and Psychology at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, cautions against the neo-orthodox attempt to read only one interpretation of the Christian faith out of the New Testament and early Christian history. ²⁶ This cannot be done without ignoring or rationalizing the differences within the gospels themselves. ²⁷ The Bible has great authority as primary evidence, but the various claims must be weighed and examined in the light of all the available evidence. Thus modern research can be a tremendous help in making it possible for each individual to study the Bible and see for himself the various interpretations of the Gospel and the teachings of Jesus. But the individual, nevertheless, must make his decision in these matters according to his own best knowledge and understanding as a result of his total experience, including

²⁵Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, trans. Douglas Horton (The Pilgrim Press, [n.d.]), p. 245.

²⁶Harrison S. Elliott, Can Religious Education Be Christian? (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), pp. 86, 90. (Copyright, 1940; sixth printing, 1953.)

²⁷Below, pp. 133-36.

the individual's knowledge and assimilation of the experience of the Christian community.²³ The Bible should have great authority for every Christian, but each one must determine, either actively or passively, what is true about it, and what convictions expressed in it are true. It is in this sense that we can say that the truth of the Bible gives it its authority. What a person considers to be true has authority for him, but he must make the choice.

²³For discussion of the individual's appropriation of the experience and understanding of others, see below, pp. 231-34.

CHAPTER VII

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS CHRIST

The appeal from the authority of the Bible, or some part of it, naturally leads to an appeal to the authority of Jesus Christ. Since the New Testament is one result of the impact of Jesus of Nazareth upon his followers, it is understandable that he should have more authority than any person talking about him. But the question is severely complicated by the conviction that he both lived and is living. This necessarily raises the question of direct relationship with him today and involves the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, discussion of this side of the question will be forthcoming in the chapter on the Holy Spirit. The question of the nature of the Incarnation is also involved in the question of the authority of Jesus, for if Jesus was and is God, then his authority would be complete and final, except for the limitations he took upon himself by giving man freedom. But regardless of whether Jesus of Nazareth was and is God, the problem reverts again to the problem of individual decision on the basis of experience. This side of the problem is well stated by Dr. Otwell when he calls attention to "the centrality of Jesus Christ in the thought and devotion of the Christian Church" and remarks that this ". . . is poor preparation for the discovery [by the skeptic]

that disagreements about this same Jesus have been both persistent and bitter."¹ Dr. Otwell's statement of the problem confronting the skeptic can well apply to any person who honestly tries to ascertain the truth about Jesus and his role; he states further:

The skeptic finds himself confronted by a religion which declares that its uniqueness is most easily stated in its devotion to its founder, but when he seeks to discover what that devotion is, and why it is held, he is confronted by a discord of strident and conflicting voices.²

Faced with such "strident and conflicting voices" let us proceed with a consideration of the question by looking first at what Jesus thought and taught about himself and his role.

First, Jesus reacted adversely to being addressed as "Good Teacher."³ This is extremely interesting and important because there is no indication of any other irritant to bring such a reaction. Also, Jesus corrected his questioner on this point before he proceeded to answer the question addressed to him. When Jesus rejected the address of "Good Teacher" and corrected his questioner by saying that only God is good, it is clear that Jesus was not claiming to be God, and that he considered himself as definitely not an equal with God. It is very interesting to compare the account in Matthew with the

¹ John H. Otwell, Ground to Stand On (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 129.

² Ibid.

³ Mk. 10:17-18; Lk. 13:18-19; cf. Matt. 19:16-17.

accounts in Mark and Luke. According to the account in Matthew, Jesus was not addressed as "Good Teacher" but just as "Teacher." However, the reply of Jesus as given in Matthew makes abundantly clear what the original wording was; according to Matthew, Jesus replied, "Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good."⁴ If Jesus had been asked "what is good," there would have been no reason for the statement "One there is who is good." Thus, clearly, as indicated by the inconsistency of the account in Matthew, the original reading is not as given there. Furthermore, the accounts given in Mark and Luke are in essential agreement and consistent; they also account for the statement, "One there is who is good," in Matthew and testify to its authenticity. This editing of the account in Matthew is a good example of the tendency of the early Christians to edit and interpret the record to agree with their later experiences and their interpretation of them. This is illustrative of the observation by Knox that whenever there has been a contest in Christian history over whether a higher or a lower term should be applied to Jesus Christ, the higher term has always been adopted.⁵ At least it should be clear from this reference that Jesus did not claim to be God and that he rejected being addressed with a term which he thought should be applied only to God. This incident is also of special importance because it has been preserved in Mark and Luke in spite of the tendency to edit it in favor of a

⁴Matt. 19:17

⁵Knox, p. 80.

higher view of Jesus as illustrated by Matthew.

Second, Jesus experienced a call to special service. The accounts of the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist make this clear. In Mark the account states that when Jesus ". . . came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.'"⁶ Note that this is phrased as a personal experience of Jesus and the voice from heaven uses "Thou" meaning the address was to Jesus, not to those around him. Luke also reads "Thou," while Matthew seems to have edited it to read "This." Luke tries to objectify his account by speaking of the Spirit descending upon Jesus "in bodily form," but this is not necessary for the experience of Jesus. A comparison of these accounts brings out the fact that Jesus felt a special call to the service of God. Further, the account in Matthew of discussion between Jesus and John the Baptist before the Baptism of Jesus⁷ is suggestive of the reflection of the early Christians trying to understand and account for the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist when, according to their interpretation, Jesus should not have needed to be baptized by anyone.

⁶Mk. 1:10-11; cf. Lk. 3:21-22; Matt. 3:13-17.

⁷Matt. 3:13-15.

Third, the stories of the temptation of Jesus following his baptism indicate that Jesus felt a call to be the Messiah, but that he had to decide how God wanted him to fulfil this mission.⁸ The question of the source and authenticity of these temptation stories might be raised, although presumably the essential story was told the disciples by Jesus. It is at least clear that Jesus met temptation and that he would have preferred to have escaped the Cross if he could have done it conscientiously--his experience in Gethsemane is ample evidence of this.⁹ The reinterpretation away from this limitation of Jesus is clearly evident in the gospel of John where Jesus is considered to have been of the nature of God and with God, and to have taken part in creation.¹⁰ Furthermore, John does not give any account of the temptation experiences of Jesus, and, significantly, according to the writer of the gospel of John, Jesus faces no major temptation in Gethsemane--there is only a faint adumbration of Gethsemane in John 12:27.¹¹

Fourth, Jesus as reported in Matthew and Mark admitted limitation of knowledge in relation to the future.

⁸Matt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-13.

⁹Mk. 14:32-42; Matt. 26:36-46; Lk. 22:40-46.

¹⁰John 1:1-5.

¹¹John 12:27 reads: "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, for this purpose I have come to this hour."

When, referring to the disciples' question about when the temple will be destroyed, he replied that no one knows the day nor the hour--no one ". . . but only the Father."¹² Thus, again, Jesus is not claiming to be God, nor to be equal with God.

Fifth, the attitude of Jesus as portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels is the attitude of a specially called servant of God. In Nazareth, Jesus read the Isaiah passage which speaks of the Spirit of the Lord being upon a person and anointing him to preach, heal, release the oppressed, and ". . . to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord," and then he applied the passage to himself.¹³ When he instructed his disciples about their attitude toward seeking position, he used the analogy of a servant, even saying that he came to serve and not to be served.¹⁴

¹²Mk. 13:30-32; Matt. 24:34-36. In his exegesis on this passage in The Interpreter's Bible, Frederick C. Grant calls attention to the variant readings of some ancient manuscripts pointing out that some manuscripts of Matthew omit "nor the Son" and that ". . . Ambrose (On Faith V.8) seems to assign the phrase in both Matthew and Mark to interpolators (Klostermann)." But Grant concludes: "But the difficulty for the church fathers, of course, lay in the assertion of limitation of the Son's knowledge, not in the literary-historical or historical-theological problem which this passage presents today." Thus we have additional evidence that the limitation of knowledge admitted here is authentic--the early fathers would have liked to get around it or berid of it somehow, apparently because it disagreed with their other views of Jesus. See: "The Gospel According to St. Mark: Exegesis," The Interpreter's Bible, ed. George A. Butrick, et al (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1951), 864-65.

¹³Lk. 4:16-21.

¹⁴Mk. 10:41-45; Matt. 20:24-28; Lk. 22:24-27.

All of these references, as well as others referred to previously in the discussion of the nature of God¹⁵ indicate Jesus did not think of himself as God but rather as a specially called servant of God.

However, although Jesus thought of himself as a specially called servant of God, the Messiah anointed with God's Spirit, he would nevertheless naturally carry considerable authority. This point no one will be disposed to contest, but the problem is how much authority. Some Christians would start with the passage at the end of the gospel according to Matthew where Jesus is reported to have said in his resurrection appearance to the disciples in Galilee, ". . . 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'"¹⁶ In his exegesis on this passage in The Interpreter's Bible, Sherman E. Johnson, Dean of the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, does not even deal with the possibility that this passage may not be authentic.¹⁷ George A. Buttrick, in his exposition on this passage, recognizes these may not be the exact words of Jesus but nevertheless credits them as true to Jesus' teaching.¹⁸

¹⁵Above, pp. 73, 76-77.

¹⁶Matt. 28:16-18.

¹⁷Sherman E. Johnson, "The Gospel According to St. Matthew: Exegesis," The Interpreter's Bible, VII, 622.

¹⁸Ibid.

Buttrick also writes:

All authority means supreme right to appoint to office: thence comes the great commission. It means right to require obedience--because of love poured out unto death, and now triumphant in the eternal kingdom. It means right to govern in both earth and heaven.¹⁹

In the light of the problematical nature of all the resurrection stories and the Jewish and Petrine interest in the gospel according to Matthew, it is hardly good scholarship to ignore these points. The discussion of this matter is much more to the point in The Mission and Message of Jesus where the resurrection accounts are carefully compared and the difficulties frankly faced.²⁰

However, there is a somewhat similar passage which may well serve as a beginning basis for understanding what authority Jesus really claimed. In Matthew 11:25 Jesus is reported as saying, "'All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'"²¹ This passage, in both Matthew and Luke, comes immediately after Jesus had upbraided the cities where he had been rejected and which he said would fare worse than Tyre and Sidon in the judgment.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰H. D. A. Major, T. W. Manson, and C. J. Wright, The Mission and Message of Jesus: An Exposition of the Gospels in the Light of Modern Research (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1938), pp. 200-218, 250.

²¹cf. Lk. 10:22 which is very similar.

He seems to have reacted against the closed-mindedness and hard-heartedness of those who rejected him and his message. Then follows the passage where he is reported to have claimed that all things had been delivered to him. Major, Manson, and Wright suggest that the essential meaning is that Jesus is conscious of having received direct understanding of God and His will and, therefore, with it the responsibility of teaching these.²² Thus, Jesus spoke with authority coming out of his experience of God and the rejection of men. It may be that the rejection he had just experienced also accounts for the extreme form of this saying. Therefore, let us turn to the consideration of other passages where Jesus refers to the subject of his authority.

First, Jesus is reported to have claimed the authority to forgive sins in the case of the paralytic whom he told to rise and go home.²³ Major, Manson, and Wright note that a priest and a prophet were considered to be in a position to pronounce "Divine forgiveness of sin."²⁴ But this hardly means the same thing as doing the forgiving in place of God. A clue here may be the question Jesus asked those who were watching: "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Rise, take

²²Major, Manson, and Wright, pp. 370-72.

²³Mk. 2:10-12; Matt. 9:6-7; Lk. 5:24-25.

²⁴Major, Manson, and Wright, p. 51.

up your pallet and walk'?"²⁵ It may be that Jesus realized the connection between a man's sense of guilt and his incapacity. Therefore, it would not be primarily the forgiveness of Jesus but the assurance of forgiveness that enabled the man to walk. As was pointed out in an earlier discussion, Jesus does not represent God as withholding any good from man because of ill will or wounded pride, but that man must respond to God to receive His good gifts and His forgiveness;²⁶ this the assuring words of Jesus could have enabled the paralytic to do. It may be that the evangelists have added in this account their interpretation of what Jesus' words and actions implied in their minds rather than what Jesus meant. Anyone can forgive sins and assure others of God's forgiveness if he feels so called and convinced by God, but not in place of God. It is interesting that Jesus did not say "I forgive you," but rather, ". . . your sins are forgiven."²⁷ With a forgiving spirit as Jesus taught God has, anyone can forgive sins, but none can forgive for God--no one needs to, as God is eager to forgive and welcome man into fellowship if only man will respond; but if man will not respond, then no one can forgive him either, not even God. Thus, whatever authority Jesus claimed, or was thought to have claimed, in this case was not an authority taking the

²⁵Mk. 2:9.

²⁶Above, pp. 73-74.

²⁷Mk. 2:5.

place of God, but rather assuring the man of God's good will and forgiveness. Any mature Christian should be able to do the same.

Second, when Jesus appointed his twelve disciples, he gave them authority to cast out demons.²⁸ And when he sent the twelve out two by two, they were given authority over unclean spirits.²⁹ It should be called to mind here that the theory of disease in that day was far different from our day, but that, nevertheless, individuals with incapacities primarily of a mental and spiritual nature would respond to this kind of approach. As is abundantly clear in many of the accounts of the healings credited to Jesus, faith on the part of the person being healed was a prerequisite. Therefore, if the disciples believed they had authority, and those who wanted to be healed also believed it, the conditions for faith healing were met.³⁰ This authority would be primarily power and confidence rather than official right.

Third, when Jesus was asked by the chief priests and

²⁸Mk. 3:14-15; Matt. 10:1.

²⁹Mk. 6:7; Matt. 10:1; Lk. 9:1-2.

³⁰The question of whether Jesus actually believed in the demon theory of disease, and thus was limited in his knowledge and understanding, or whether he did not believe in demons but used the language and thought-forms people understood so he could communicate with them is a moot question and does not need to be discussed here as it does not affect the question of authority at this point.

the scribes and the elders, sometime after he had driven the pigeon sellers and money changers from the temple, by what authority he did these things, he evaded a direct answer,³¹ probably because he knew their attitude, and did not want, at least then, to be accused again of blasphemy as he had been in Capernaum in connection with the healing of the paralytic.³² But Jesus' authority is questioned in still another way--the request for a sign from heaven, in other words, some special action of God that would clearly authenticate his message and actions. It is significant that Jesus refused to try to give any sign outside of his teachings and actions. Thus, in Mark 8:11-12 Jesus is reported to have said that no sign would be given to that generation. Matthew 16:4 quotes Jesus as having said: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah." In Matthew 12:38-42 and Luke 11:29-32, Jesus is again asked for a sign. This time he spoke of a sign but not the kind his questioners had in mind. He pointed out that ". . . the men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah . . ." and stated that no other sign would be given to that generation.³³ Thus, Jesus' attitude toward his

³¹Mk. 11:27-33; Matt. 21:23-27; Lk. 20:1-8.

³²Mk. 2:6; Matt. 9:3; Lk. 5:21.

³³The attempt of the compiler or editor of Matthew to interpret the sign of Jonah as Jesus' period in the tomb is clearly a misinterpretation of what Jesus meant.

authority and the authority of his teachings comes clear. His teachings stand on the truth they contain, and not on a special sign from God which would only serve to continue a legalistic attitude on the part of his questioners. Jesus also knew that any healing would be interpreted as indicating he was in league with the prince of the demons, as it had been before.³⁴ No wonder he did not accede to the requests for a sign! If people are not disposed to receive the truth, it cannot be made understood or acceptable by a special sign. A man must out of his experience and an open heart say yes to the truth which wins his acceptance and allegiance. Thus, the authority of Jesus can be known to us through the truth of his teachings as confirmed in experience. And the more we accept his teachings as valid, the more we accept his authority over us. But no one can do this for us--others can only add their testimony, both in words and actions, which encourage us to look and see. Christ's authority is the authority of a servant who understands because of his own experience, but this does not make him infallible. What we really have in the Incarnation is the realization in a human life of the most perfect image of God that has been known, and the call of this spiritually anointed person to the fullest revelation of God, His love, and His will to his fellowmen. In so far as Jesus' teachings are true in the sight of God, he has authority over us. But the authority to make the decision rests with each one, and involves a

³⁴Mk. 3:22; Matt. 12:24; Lk. 11:15-16.

choice between various points of view and interpretations of Jesus of Nazareth. Where scholars substantially agree in their interpretations, the problem is minimized; where they disagree, we are forced to make our own conclusions in the light of the best that we know.

This view that the authority of Jesus is dependent upon the truth of his teachings is expressed by several modern writers. Sabatier pointed out that "his teaching forces itself upon souls because it takes hold of them and subjugates them as the truth itself does when it shows itself in its own luminous evidence . . ."³⁵ Bertocci also brings in the necessity of experience in recognizing Jesus' authority when he writes: "If Jesus' life and claims have validity they have it because the values of such living and the truth of these claims is re-established in the criticized experience of persons."³⁶ The authority for this truth which Jesus taught and lived came out of his own experience of fellowship and communion with God and his understanding of life and of persons. Thus he spoke with a first-hand authority, and not as the scribes.³⁷ This does not make him infallible, as Sabatier points out,³⁸ but it recognizes his genuineness and his appeal to the conscience of the

³⁵Sabatier, p. 285.

³⁶Bertocci, p. 88.

³⁷Mk. 1:21-22; Matt. 7:28-29; Lk. 4:31-32.

³⁸Sabatier, p. 234. Sabatier even thinks that ". . . the thought of Jesus was precisely to abolish religions of external authority and to found the inward religion of the Spirit; that is, a direct communion with God, established in the renewed conscience," p. 234.

individual. Major, Manson, and Wright also think that Jesus taught ". . . emphatically that moral and spiritual teaching are self-authenticating and do not require the support of miracles."³⁹ It is interesting that in the late 1860's a Unitarian pastor, Francis Ellingwood Abbot, was saying essentially this same thing.⁴⁰

Similar to the view that the authority of Jesus is in the truth of his teachings is the view that Jesus' authority was that of moral contagion.⁴¹ Hillyer Straton, a Baptist pastor who has been active in the ecumenical movement, writes that "for Jesus . . . the question of authority is the question of the Kingdom of God. In other words, Jesus is saying that authority lies in the ability to appreciate moral judgments in the light of total revelation."⁴² Therefore, his authority for the individual would function through an individual's moral sensitivity and understanding. R. H. Strachan thinks Jesus aroused the consciences of men so that they recognized the truth of what he taught and logically answered the questions by which he both answered questions and stimulated the thought of his hearers. Thus Jesus provoked ". . . independent

³⁹Major, Manson, and Wright, p. 106.

⁴⁰Persons, p. 34.

⁴¹Sabatier, p. 288.

⁴²Hillyer H. Straton, "Where Is Our Authority? A Baptist View," Anglican Theological Review, XXXVII (April, 1955), 135.

thought and free intuitive assent to his teaching."⁴³

Strachan also states that "the moral authority which Jesus seeks to convey to men is ultimately not his own, but 'the will of Him that sent me.'"⁴⁴ This recognizes the subordination of Jesus to God. However, Strachan goes too far when he asserts that ". . . the most striking feature in the moral authority of Jesus is the way in which he seeks to attach men to his own person."⁴⁵ This writer would suggest that Jesus sought to attach men to his message, which he believed was the message of God, and not primarily to himself. It was not essentially loyalty to himself which he wanted, but loyalty to God and His will. But concepts of the moral authority of Jesus naturally lead to the question whether his sinlessness and holiness certify his authority.

Holiness, and sinlessness if it exists, would certainly contribute to the moral authority of anyone, as long as what constitutes holiness or sinlessness is not

⁴³Strachan, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 200.

⁴⁵Ibid. Strachan even states as an incontrovertible fact that Jesus ". . . never discouraged, but supremely encouraged a complete abandonment of faith towards himself, as he interpreted his own relation to God and man . . ." and asserts that ". . . to doubt [this fact, as he calls it] for a moment" would be ". . . sheer tampering with history. . . ." p. 245. He conveniently ignores scriptures to the contrary, especially the reference where Jesus rejects the designation "Good Teacher," Mk. 10:17-19, and parallels.

misunderstood nor construed in legalistic terms. Strachan refers to "the authority of Jesus' sinlessness," and states that "he had no other channels of moral and spiritual strength than we possess."⁴⁶ For Strachan, Jesus' sinlessness was his achievement, with the same channels and opportunities that are available to us to receive God's help and guidance.⁴⁷ This would enhance the genuineness of his teaching and living, but it would not guarantee his infallibility. Sabatier speaks of the cleansing effect of holiness on a person's mind, but points out this does not give infallibility. He calls attention to Jesus' inheritance of ". . . the religious conceptions and traditions of his people, so far as these did not run counter to his personal religious inspiration," but adds that ". . . neither in fact nor in theory is it right or possible to postulate the absolute infallibility of the sayings of Jesus in the historic form in which we possess them."⁴⁸ Thus, we must recognize that Jesus is not an authority on Biblical scholarship and that we have no guarantee that we have the exact words of Jesus.⁴⁹ Therefore, we are again forced back to our own

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 223.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Sabatier, p. 266.

⁴⁹C. H. Dodd expresses the same conclusions; see his The Authority of the Bible (London: Nisbet & Co., LTD., 1948 [first printed, 1928; revised, 1938]), pp. 230-41.

study, including the study of others, to help us make the final decision for ourselves.

Finally, in what sense is the authority of Jesus final? In a "Statement on the Report of the Advisory Commission on the Main Theme," adopted by the Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1954, Christ is referred to as ". . . the Word of God which alone has eternal authority and power . . ." ⁵⁰ This statement very naturally does not discuss the problems involved in a reflective consideration of it. The statement is suggestive of the statement of faith of the World Council of Churches which asserts that Jesus is God. ⁵¹ But as has been stated previously in this study, this writer considers Jesus to be the chosen Son of God and Messiah, but not God. ⁵² Thus, for this writer, any sense in which Jesus has "eternal authority and power" is conditional upon the continued experience of the validity of his teachings. Strachan

⁵⁰The World Council of Churches, "Statement on the Report of the Advisory Commission on the Main Theme," The Ecumenical Review, VII (Oct., 1954), 65.

⁵¹This statement that Jesus is God is seriously questioned by some and raises basic concerns for others about the whole ecumenical movement. See Clarence Tucker Craig's "The Christological Foundation of the World Council of Churches," Christendom, XI (1946), 12-22; also his The One Church in the Light of the New Testament (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), cited by Knox, p. 80. See also Marion John Bradshaw, Free Churches and Christian Unity, A Critical View of the Ecumenical Movement and the World Council of Churches (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1954), esp. pp. 41-61. Bradshaw has been Professor of the Philosophy of Religion at Bangor Theological Seminary, Bangor, Maine, since 1925.

⁵²Above, pp. 133-38.

refers to Canon Streeter's reference to Christ as "... final 'not in the sense of having arrived at the end of the journey, but in having once for all discovered the right road.'" ⁵³ This is an excellent statement, but it implies more than Strachan recognizes. This leaves opportunity for Jesus to have been fallible in some of his knowledge, and even perhaps his judgments, but it asserts rightly his "way." This points to the inner and abiding spirit of Christ which so communed with God that he can lead us into that same communion and fellowship if we will but follow. This does not mean that we must follow blindly. Rather, we can have faith in the direction which Jesus traveled and beckons, but at the same time accept new knowledge which was not available to Jesus. But the spirit of Jesus and the principles which he taught and lived remain. In this sense, the authority of Jesus is final, but this is again, as Strachan notes, "a private judgment of faith." ⁵⁴ However, this does not need to be blind faith, but the faith of a mature person who has repeatedly found in his own experience the confirmation of the essential truth of Jesus' teachings. Thus Jesus' authority is final in the sense of standing the tests of experience, but never with the suggestion that the question cannot be reopened in the light of new evidence.

⁵³B. H. Streeter, Adventure, p. 173, quoted by Strachan, p. 241.

⁵⁴Strachan, p. 193.

CHAPTER VIII

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH

Wherever human beings live in close proximity to each other over any extended period of time, they develop some organization to regularize their associations and to carry on in an orderly way the endeavors and enterprises deemed necessary or desirable. Thus, a tribe of American Indians had a chief, a hunting party has a leader, a football team has a captain, and a country has a king, president, or prime minister. Any kind of organization carries with it positions which exercise some degree of authority. The tendency is for those in positions which exercise authority in either State or Church to enjoy the status and exercise of power which the positions entail. Then people in such positions tend to seek to continue in their positions. As a form of social or religious organization and endeavor becomes an institution with persons in positions of authority and power, the tendency is for the authority and power to be centralized and continued permanently. Then the leaders become interested enough in their positions to legislate and decree those laws and interpretations which maintain the power of the institution

and those in control. This may be done in good faith with a paternalistic benevolence which is welcomed by those who are happy to think they are relieved of the responsibility to think, or those who so detest strife that they cannot challenge the misuse of authority and power and the drift toward authoritarianism even within a church or the Church.

Regardless of the origin of the Church, the Protestant world is faced with the problem of the nature of the Church, how much power and authority it has or should have, and how it should be governed. Walter G. Muelder, Dean and Professor of Ethics at the Boston University School of Theology, states that "both Lausanne in 1927 and Edinburgh in 1937 agreed that a reunited church would recognize the appropriate place of the episcopal, presbyterian, and congregational systems of government."¹ From the Orientation Paper for Section 7 of the Oberlin Faith and Order Study Conference, Muelder quotes the statement that "the various denominational polities--no matter how different in history and form--appear to screen power structures which are strikingly similar in their foci of power and contemporary operation."² If this is true, we must carefully consider the nature of the Church, what authority it should have, what functions it should have,

¹Walter G. Muelder, "Institutionalism in Relation to Unity and Disunity," An Address at the North American Faith and Order Study Conference, Oberlin, Ohio, Sept., 1957, p. 7. (Mimeographed.)

²Ibid., p. 9, quoting from the Orientation Paper for Section 7, "Report on Authority and Freedom in Church Government," prepared by the New York Study Group, p. 7. (Mimeographed.)

and how it should be governed. This is a vital issue of far-reaching importance for the future of Christianity and the religious education work of the Church. It is not intended here to propose a doctrine of the Church, but to show where a free consideration of the question leads and what is the necessary basis for deciding concerning the legitimate authority of the Church.

The Nature of the Church

There are two or three basic concepts of the nature of the Church. One of these is the "Catholic" concept, which is represented by the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox churches, the Old Catholic Church, and the Catholic wing of the Anglican Church. As is indicated by Dr. Harkness, this concept emphasizes apostolic succession, and asserts that ". . . the Christian Church owes its origin and its authority to its having been constituted by Christ's commission to Peter . . . , and [that] no church is truly a church, no minister or priest validly ordained, and hence no sacrament really a sacrament, unless its ministry has been ordained by the laying on of hands of a bishop who stands in this historic succession."³ This position implies that the "whole and full

³Georgia Harkness, Foundations of Christian Knowledge (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), pp. 139-40. For fuller statements of this "Catholic" concept and position, see the statements of the respective communions in The Nature of the Church, ed. by R. Newton Flew for the World Conference on Faith and Order (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1952). (This book is composed of papers presented to the Theological Commission appointed by the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order for discussion at the third World Conference on Faith and Order at Lund, Sweden, Aug., 1952.)

truth" has already been given, as Florovsky, for example, states.⁴ The Church, then, would have the responsibility of spreading this revealed truth and obtaining the assent of people in simple faith and trusting obedience to the divinely ordained and guided priests and bishops. According to this "Catholic" view, apostolic succession is of the essence of the Church.⁵

A second basic concept of the nature of the Church is sometimes referred to as the "Reformation Protestant," and is represented by the Lutheran, the Presbyterian, and the various other Reformed churches. The churches which represent this concept emphasize justification by faith, the pure preaching of the Word, and the administration of the two sacraments.⁶ According to this view, apostolic succession in the historic episcopate is not of the essence of the Church, but the pure preaching of the Word as revealed in the Bible is. The two sacraments are essential means of grace, but are not the only means of salvation.

A possible third concept of the nature of the Church is the view that the Church is a fellowship of Christians gathered by the action of God and Christ through the Holy Spirit. Churches with congregation-centered polity represent

⁴Florovsky, The Student World, XLIII (First Quarter, 1950), 70.

⁵More attention will be given later to the question of apostolic succession; see below, pp. 157-64.

⁶See Harkness, Foundations of Christian Knowledge, pp. 140-41; see also the Lutheran statement by Eric Wahlstrom and the Presbyterian statement by Frederic W. Loetscher in The Nature of the Church, pp. 266-67 and 318-19 respectively.

states that "the true nature of the Church is koinonia" but recognizes the need for "organization and law" and "rules of faith and practice."¹⁰ But Yearsley is concerned lest the dogmatism that tends to come with law and organization destroy the koinonia. He thinks the "rule of ecclesiastical hierarchy" follows the pattern of secular authority which Jesus is reported to have denounced in Mark 10:42-44 where he emphasized the attitude of service rather than "Gentile lordship."

It is significant, as Edwin Lewis states, that the Amsterdam Assembly of the World Council of Churches ". . . could not agree on a statement concerning the Church, and had to be content with accepting and publishing a number of different statements representing different points of view."¹¹ It is also significant that the Report of the Third World Conference on Faith and Order contains a reference to the ". . . present irreconcilable disagreement . . . on the question whether some particular form of ministerial order is essential to the continuity of the Church," and also mentions the "special importance" some give ". . . to the credal documents of the Early Ecumenical Councils."¹²

It is not necessary for the purposes of this study to enter into the debate concerning which is the true or truest concept of the Church. It is sufficient to note that from

¹⁰Yearsley, The Congregational Quarterly, XXIV, (July, 1956), 224.

¹¹Lewis, p. 223.

¹²Report of the Third World Conference on Faith and Order, p. 12.

the various sides comes the claim of direct guidance by God and the Spirit. Therefore, the individual is forced again to make his own decision in the light of his own best information and experience.

The Nature and Extent of the Authority of the Church

As there is not agreement on the nature of the Church, neither is there agreement on the nature and extent of its authority. All would agree that the authority of the Church ultimately comes from God and the living Christ, but there is serious disagreement when Christians of different church backgrounds face the question of how this authority is or should be delegated and exercised. As was pointed out earlier: the more authority is claimed because of apostolic succession, the less room there will be for private judgment in matters of doctrine and possible re-appraisal and re-statement of it; and the less emphasis there is on the importance of apostolic succession, the greater will be the claims for the authority of the Bible and the appeal for reformation of the Church through the authority of the Bible.¹³ Equally strong statements for and against apostolic succession can be cited. Francis Gray, a priest of the Church of England, asserts that "Apostolic succession is valued primarily as a guarantee of the Church's continuity, of fidelity to the faith of the Apostles and of the Church

¹³Above, p. 16

through the centuries!"¹⁴ He thinks that those churches which have not maintained Apostolic succession have been more divisive than those which have. He seems sympathetic to the Eastern Orthodox emphasis on "continuity of life and thought" through Apostolic succession.¹⁵ Further, Gray states that Canon Hodgson ". . . writes that the belief [in Apostolic succession] rightly assumes that God wills to give His grace through the appointed means of rightly ordained ministers."¹⁶ In his further comments, Gray recognizes the efficaciousness of Protestant services, if the doctrine is right; he seems to consider Apostolic succession as insurance the doctrine will be right, while at the same time recognizing the fact that the Church erred, at least before the Reformation.¹⁷ P. J. Mann, professor at the Theological College in Amersfoot, and Canon of the Metropolitan Chapter of Utrecht Old Catholic Church, in the Netherlands, states that

the value of the Apostolic Succession is to be sought not so much in the actual unbroken line of bishops as in the security this offers for continuity with the Church of the Apostles, as regards not merely apostolic office, but, in equal degree, apostolic doctrine. The bishop led the liturgy, guarded the faith, maintained

¹⁴Francis Gray, "The Apostolic Succession as an Ecumenical Issue--An Anglican View," The Ecumenical Review, IV (Jan., 1952), 142.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 142-43.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 144-50.

discipline, and in his person guaranteed the unity of the *lex credendi* and the *lex orandi*."¹⁸

But it is claimed by others that apostolic succession is no guarantee of authentic transmission of the Christian Gospel. In The Reunion of the Church, Lesslie Newbigin recognizes the desirability of continuity and thinks it ". . . belongs to her [the Church's] proper nature as the visible expression of unity in love."¹⁹ But he also recognizes that the Church is sinful and therefore reasons that ". . . it is wrong to define the Church solely in terms of historic continuity apart from reference to that Gospel by faith in which the Church at all times lives."²⁰ Therefore reference to the Gospel is of comparable importance to apostolic succession and introduces "another principle of identification," as Newbigin states it. Eric Duncan then comments on Newbigin's words as follows:

This means that neither in the existence of the Church as a historically continuous body nor in the possession of an unbroken succession of a ministerial order can there be any guarantee of the Church's claim to be the true Church of God.²¹

¹⁸P. J. Mann, "The Meaning and Significance of Tradition, according to the Old Catholic Conception," The Ecumenical Review, I (Summer, 1949), 397. (This completely ignores the fact that spiritual insight and sensitivity is not necessarily transferred from one Bishop to another.)

¹⁹J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, The Reunion of the Church, p. 64, cited by Eric M. Duncan, Review of The Reunion of the Church, The Student World, XLI (Fourth Quarter, 1948), 382.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Eric M. Duncan, The Student World, XLI (Fourth Quarter, 1948), 382.

Newbigin's statement that the Church is sinful and that reference to the Gospel introduces "another principle of identification" is significant because it implies that the Gospel is superior to apostolic succession and the Church when ascertaining what is the most authentic guide to true continuity.

The writer of this study would call attention to the fact that the relevance of the Apostle Paul for the importance or unimportance of apostolic succession has been largely overlooked. Edwin Lewis refers to Paul and his importance as follows:

By any calculation the most effective and far-ranging leader of the Early Church was Paul, who was an "ecclesiastical irregular," not having been one of the original Twelve, and not having been "episcopally ordained." What "laying on of hands" Paul knew was by "prophets and teachers" (ch. 13:1-3 [of Acts]). A theory of "apostolate" that cannot find a place for Paul--to say nothing of Barnabas and Silas--might very well re-examine its premises.²²

There is no record of an ordination of Paul by any of the other Apostles. When Paul and Barnabas were sent out from Antioch on their missionary journey, there was a laying on of hands,²³ but no suggestion any of the twelve apostles were present or had delegated any authority or responsibility for any such action. Rather, according to the author of the Gospel according to Luke, Paul and Barnabas were considered to be "sent out by the Holy Spirit."²⁴ Paul is reported to

²²Lewis, p. 209.

²³Acts 13:1-3.

²⁴Acts 13:4.

have been baptized in Damascus, perhaps by the obscure Ananias,²⁵ who is referred to as a disciple,²⁶ but there is no suggestion that Paul was commissioned or ordained as an Apostle by any man. Later, when Paul had returned from Damascus to Jerusalem and when the disciples were afraid of him, Barnabas took him to the Apostles and told them what had happened to Paul and how he had preached at Damascus. Therefore, the Apostles accepted Paul as a disciple, but there is no suggestion that he was considered an Apostle nor that he was in any sense ordained.²⁷ What the passages suggest is that he was accepted as a bona fide Christian, a disciple, and as such could speak in the Christian meetings when he felt so moved as any other Christian could.

Paul claimed emphatically to have received his call and gospel through a revelation of Jesus Christ,²⁸ and that he was an apostle ". . . not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father . . ."²⁹ Paul stated further: ". . . I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus."³⁰ Then he referred to going up to Jerusalem

²⁵Acts 9:10-19.

²⁶Acts 9:1.

²⁷Acts 9:26-30.

²⁸Gal. 1:12.

²⁹Gal. 1:1.

³⁰Gal. 1:16-17.

after three years to visit Cephas for fifteen days, but asserted that he ". . . saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother."³¹ Fourteen years later, "by revelation" Paul went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas ". . . and laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain."³²

Paul stated further:

And from those who were reputed to be something (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)--those, I say, who were of repute added nothing to me; but on the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me also for the Gentiles), and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised . . .³³

Thus, according to Paul, his direct call and gospel were recognized even by Peter, as well as his being chosen by Christ for the mission to the Gentiles. This should be telling evidence for the legitimacy of those ministers without apostolic succession. Paul was the charismatic apostle par excellence, accepted even by Peter, John, and James the Lord's brother, as the chosen apostle to the

³¹Gal. 1:18-19.

³²Gal. 2:1-2.

³³Gal. 2:6-10.

Gentiles.

Kee and Young, in their recent book, Understanding the New Testament, recognize that Paul stressed ". . . the importance of the charismatic ministry, which arose as a spontaneous response to the action of the Spirit (I Cor. 12)."³⁴ Kee and Young also state that "Paul himself, though often at odds with the apostles in Jerusalem, insisted that he was faithful to this tradition," i.e., "the tradition that had been delivered to them by Jesus Christ."³⁵ These authors state further than an ". . . apostle was the one who had received the tradition from the Lord and then transmitted it faithfully to the community," and then note that ". . . the major debate between Paul and the apostles Peter, James, and John centered on whether or not Paul's teaching was true to the tradition."³⁶ Kee and Young do not dwell on this point, but it is significant in showing that, although the apostles were looked up to and appealed to, yet they themselves had difficulty agreeing. Further, it was the interpretation of the tradition as stated and championed by Paul, the charismatic apostle par excellence, that prevailed. In this case, the decision was not based upon

³⁴Howard Clark Kee and Franklin W. Young, Understanding the New Testament (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), p. 354. (Mr. Kee is a professor at The Theological School, Drew University and Mr. Young is a professor at The Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest.)

³⁵Ibid., p. 357.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 357-58.

apostolic succession, and those who might have been considered to stand more firmly in such a line of succession were not the champions of the interpretation that prevailed, and which surely was true to the Gospel.

Faced with these varying opinions and arguments concerning apostolic succession and its importance, the individual must again resort to his own choice of whose opinion he chooses as authoritative or make a study of the issue for himself. Closely related to the question of apostolic authority are the questions of the authority of tradition and of the ministry of the Church. These will be considered later³⁷ in order that we can here continue consideration of the question of the authority of the Church in its various aspects.

The Task and Function of the Church

From the question of the nature and extent of the authority of the Church, let us turn to the question of its task and function. The "Report of the Advisory Commission on the Main Theme of the Second Assembly" of the World Council of Churches, speaking in a functional sense, states:

The Church . . . becomes, in the first place, witness and evidence of that which God has done, and the sign of that which He is doing and will yet do. . . .

Second, the Church is also the means through which God is carrying His purpose to effect. . . .

Third, the Church is designed to be the field where the glory of God, once manifested in Jesus Christ to

³⁷Below, pp. 174-92.

those who had eyes to see, will be revealed to the whole created universe, which meanwhile waits for the manifestation of the sons of God."³³

This is a careful statement which avoids the real issue of how and with what authority the Church does or can fulfill these functions and how far its authority should extend.

Archbishop Gregg of the Church of England states his concept of the function and authority of the Church in a form which sharply poses the issues. He writes that the Church is

"... the extension in time and space of the Incarnate Word of God ... [and is] no self-constituted Society of like-minded seekers after ideal truth or of admirers of the

prophet Jesus ... "³⁹ On the contrary, Archbishop Gregg asserts that the Church is "... a society founded and constituted by an invisible Head in whom resides all its vitality and apart from whom it can do nothing."⁴⁰ Horton points out that in interpreting the phrase referring to the Church as "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, "... Gregg stresses the once-for-all 'given-ness' of the Church's faith and structure, which must be continuously maintained across the centuries."⁴¹ Furthermore, Gregg states that the Church's

³³ The World Council of Churches, "Report of the Advisory Commission on the Main Theme of the Second Assembly, Christ--the Hope of the World," The Ecumenical Review, VI (July, 1954), 441.

³⁹ John A. F. Gregg, Writing in The Universal Church and God's Design, Amsterdam Assembly Series, Vol. 1, p. 59, quoted by Walter M. Horton, The Ecumenical Review, I (Summer, 1949), 375.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 376.

. . . business is not to declare new truths, but faithfully to hand on the deposit which has been accepted always everywhere and by all . . . Authority in the Church was committed to the Apostles who were divinely designated as its organs to exercise in it a permanent stewardship of grace and truth . . . an illustration not of evolution upwards but of devolution downwards . . . authority and continuity necessary for the preservation of its identity . . . no self-appointed or self-governing democracy.⁴²

This implies that the Church's authority is of the monarchical type and that it teaches the truth once and for all time delivered to the saints. In theory, this might allow the unlimited authority of the Church as in the days before the Reformation; the authority of the Church and of its ministry could be claimed to have the right to the final word on earth concerning what the Christian Gospel is and what one must believe and do to be saved.

With the extreme position on the function and authority of the Church, many would take issue, and some of the same communion would modify the extent to which the authority of the Church should be carried. Thus Thouless thinks "the function of the Church as guardian of the faith need not be regarded as the dictation of an ancient group as to what one must believe at the present time," but rather ". . . as the provision of a chart which will help the ordinary church-member to attain the goal of love for God and for his neighbour."⁴³ Instead of thinking of the Church as dictating what a man must believe, Thouless thinks one of

⁴²ibid.

⁴³Thouless, p. 84.

not out of date, although agreeing that ". . . the function of the Church is not that of tutelage or censorship of the beliefs of its members"48 Thus it seems Thouless believes in a modified authority for the Church which would decry persecution and allow considerable freedom of thought, and yet an authority which ultimately would have the right to decide what opinions were to be acceptable within the Church, and certainly what doctrines could be taught.

When the authority of the Church is stressed, there is always the need to call attention to the need for limitation, or at least moderation, of the extents to which that authority may rightfully go. The Report of Division I of the North American Faith and Order Study Conference recapitulates much of the discussion in that division by stating that ". . . (a) unity belongs to the essential nature of the Church; . . . "but that this unity "(c) . . . must provide freedom for an extensive measure of diversity."49 This emphasizes the need for freedom within unity and applies also to the authority of the Church. Sabatier recognizes the need for institutions, including the Church as an institution, but thinks of them as "auxiliary forces." Nevertheless, he asserts, institutions ". . . become contrary to the gospel when, being human, they take upon themselves divine attributes

48Ibid., p. 82.

49World Council of Churches, Report of Division I of the North American Faith and Order Study Conference, Oberlin, Ohio, Sept. 1957, p. 4. (Mimeographed.)

and by virtue of these attributes substitute themselves for the authority of God, and assume to be mediators between God and the human soul . . . "50 Strachan asserts that "the freedom of the living personality must ever be of the essence of the Church in whatever directions the outward form of the society may develop . . . "51 He thinks that ". . . the Church as a living institution must recognize that it cannot continue to exercise authority, save only in so far as it encourages initiative of thought and belief among its individual members."52 For him, "the nature of its authority as a guardian of the past . . . ultimately depends on whether it seeks to encourage personal judgments of faith . . . "53 Thus, the Church's ". . . authority upon the individual is felt in the measure in which he recognizes that in the membership of the society, he is himself the child of the ages . . . " and by this recognition is delivered from "sheer individualism."54

In Knox's discussion of the authority of the Church he suggests that we accept the canon and the creeds on the authority of the Church, even though we may not realize it and think we are acknowledging "only the authority of the

50Sabatier, p. 296.

51Strachan, p. 97.

52Ibid.

53Ibid.

54Ibid.

event."⁵⁵ But Knox overlooks the possibility that we may, and sometimes do, study the evidence concerning the development of the creeds and the interpretations of the event in the light of careful and open study of them. Therefore, the final authority for a person may be his own estimate of the validity of the claims, decisions, and interpretations of the events in question. Thus the authority of the Church and its decisions would be limited, and subject to individual reappraisal of them. In other words, we have to decide for ourselves even the question of how dependable a witness the Church is.

The Church and the Bible

There is the additional complicated question of the relation of the Bible and the Church. In the Protestant Reformation, the Bible was appealed to as more authoritative than the Church.⁵⁶ But now, especially as a result of the ecumenical movement, the question of the comparative authority of the Bible and the Church has become an issue because of the confrontation of the various free churches, the Anglicans, and the Eastern Orthodox and their different convictions regarding this question. A. G. Hebert tries to solve the problem by asserting that ". . . the two can never be

⁵⁵Knox, The Early Church and the Coming Great Church, p. 149.

⁵⁶Rupert E. Davies, The Problem of Authority in the Continental Reformers: A Study in Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin gives an excellent discussion of this and shows that each of these reformers very understandably appealed to the Bible over the Roman Catholic Church.

separated".⁵⁷ He comments that chronologically the Church came first, but that the Bible became ". . . the authoritative witness to Him Who had existed from the beginning and had called the Church into existence for His glory."⁵⁸ This implies both the concept of the pre-existence of Christ and of the Church as existing in some sense in Old Testament times.⁵⁹ Hebert asserts that "the Bible can never be rightly understood apart from that tradition of the Israel of God out of which it arose,"⁶⁰ but he seems to imply that "apart from the Israel of God" means outside the Christian Church. Everyone who studies the Bible, or even Church history, analytically, historically, and critically, in a very real sense stands somewhat outside the Christian community in the process, and examines and evaluates both. Similarly, when a person introspectively looks at himself, he in some sense stands outside himself and analyses and perhaps criticizes his thoughts and actions. It is true that the Bible must be studied in relation to the tradition, but in a very real sense it is the most original statement we have of the tradition. Therefore, after the people in the Church produced the writings of the New Testament and canonized them, those writings then automatically became the most authoritative statements of the

⁵⁷Hebert, The Student World, XLII (First Quarter, 1949), 116.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 112.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 116. Hebert states here the view that ". . . the whole Bible presupposes the existence of the Israel of God, which is the Church."

⁶⁰Ibid.

tradition. Therefore, the New Testament is more authoritative than later tradition as represented by the thinking of the Church in subsequent years and serves as a standard for evaluating the teaching and practice of the Church. Hebert even states the view that "the healthy life of the Church absolutely demands that the Bible be read, taught, preached, meditated upon, and obeyed."⁶¹ Thus, in practice, Hebert really admits the authority of the Bible over the Church, although he might not agree this is implied in what he states.

The position of the Eastern Orthodox churches on the comparative authority of the Bible and the Church is clear. Helle Georgiadis expresses the position clearly when she states that, although "the Scriptures are entrusted to the whole Church . . . the authoritative teaching rests with the bishops."⁶² Paul Evdokimoff states that dogmatic truth is supreme and that any teaching or interpretation opposed to it ". . . must be set aside."⁶³ George Florovsky also states the Eastern Orthodox position in strong terms. He states that ". . . the whole and the full truth has been already given and entrusted to the Church,"⁶⁴ although he makes some statements which suggest at least the possibility the deposit of

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Georgiadis, The Student World, XLIV (First Quarter 1956), 67.

⁶³Evdokimoff, The Student World, XLII (Second Quarter, 1949), 154.

⁶⁴Florovsky, The Student World, XLIII (First Quarter, 1950), 69.

faith was not faithfully kept in every respect, which in turn suggests the necessity of some standard by which such a decision could be made.⁶⁵

Confronted with these varying views of the comparative authority of the Church and the Bible, the thoughtful individual is stimulated to go to the sources for himself or consult those who claim the knowledge and understanding upon which to make a true decision.

As a result of this review of attitudes toward the authority of the Church in its various phases, it appears that on the questions of the nature of the Church, of the extent and nature of its authority, of the task and function of the Church, and of the comparative authority of the Church and the Bible, there are wide and often contradictory differences of opinion. Therefore, the individual is again faced with the necessity of choosing what opinion he will hold. The individual will most certainly utilize the research and thinking of other people in coming to his decision, but he has the responsibility to choose, even if he makes a passive choice of whose opinion he will accept. The thinking person will feel the need to make the most adequate possible study of the points at issue in order to attain the basis upon which to make an intelligent decision--others may be satisfied with some other person's opinion--but in view of the differences of opinion, the individual again must choose, and in the process appeal to some authority beyond the Church.

⁶⁵See above, p. 25.

CHAPTER IX

THE AUTHORITY OF TRADITION AND THE MINISTRY

Closely related to the question of the authority of the Church are the questions of the authority of tradition and the ministry. There is much inter-relation in all such forms of authority, and discussion of them, yet there are distinctive emphases which should be dealt with separately.

The Authority of Tradition

The concept of tradition tends to be larger and more inclusive than the term Gospel, and includes the decisions and customs which become a part of the on-going life and practice of the Church. P. J. Mann speaks of tradition as ". . . the concept of continuity, with its awareness of forming part of the mighty host of witnesses to Christ, part of the Church through all generations . . .," including everything the Church does.¹ Mann sums up his article on "The Meaning and Significance of Tradition, according to the Old Catholic Conception" with the following statement:

. . . we may subscribe to the statement drawn up at the Union Conference of Bonn in 1874, the first, albeit unofficial, meeting between Anglicans, Orthodox, and Old Catholics:

¹Mann, The Ecumenical Review, I (Summer, 1949), 396.

"The Holy Scriptures being recognized as the primary rule of faith, we agree that the genuine tradition (i.e., the unbroken transmission, partly oral, partly in writing, of the doctrine delivered by Christ and the Apostles) is an authoritative source of teaching for all successive generations of Christians. This tradition is partly to be found in the consensus of the great ecclesiastical bodies standing in historical continuity with the primitive Church, partly to be gathered by scientific method from the written documents of all centuries."²

This is a clear and concise statement of the concept of tradition and its role from a Catholic and Orthodox perspective. However, this statement implies the infallibility and consistency of tradition. Such infallibility and consistency is seriously challenged.

Knox asserts that if you study the New Testament and ". . . compare any two books (or groups of books) by different authors . . . you confront a much wider diversity of belief than can be found between almost any two of our modern denominations"; he asserts further that ". . . this diversity cannot be limited to belief."³ Knox claims this diversity is within the canonized literature of the Church, and he points out that the diversity of thought and belief in the early church must have been even greater than that evident within its canonized literature.⁴ In addition, the late Professor Easton of the General Theological Seminary traces the history of scholarship in the last one hundred

²Ibid.

³Knox, p. 22.

⁴Ibid., p. 23.

years on the problem of liberty and authority in the New Testament and then states in summary:

No system of theology that pleads for complete uniformity of Christian thinking can claim to be the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints, the words which have been spoken aforetime by the apostles. . . . It is the one Foundation that matters, not the structure that may be reared upon it. Christians may argue validly for "better" systems in contrast to those less good. But "the one true system of Christian theology" is known to God alone.⁵

When the appeal is made to tradition, the additional problem of the variance of tradition and interpretations of it in different centuries must be faced. Knox points this out and asserts that the authority of first century Christianity is superior to the authority of the second. He states that "the ultimate norm in Christianity is the event of which the life of the primitive church is the immediate reflection . . ." and thinks that ". . . all forms of faith, worship, and polity adopted by the church or some part of it . . ." should be evaluated with ". . . reference to their relation to the event or to the universal Spirit of the Church . . ."⁶ Knox recognizes a common creed in the early church, but this was definitely minimal, being some form of

⁵Burton Scott Easton, "Authority and Liberty in the New Testament," Anglican Theological Review, XXXV (July, 1953), 166-67, 173. (A note at the beginning of the article states: "The following paper by the late Professor Easton was probably his last literary work. We are indebted to the Rev. Professor P. M. Dawley for a copy and to the General Theological Seminary for permission to print it.")

⁶Knox, p. 146.

the belief that "Jesus is Lord and Christ."⁷

As the appeal to the authority of tradition is challenged, as we have seen, by disagreement over what is the true tradition, the appeal to the authority of tradition also encounters disagreement over the extent of that authority. Evdokimoff implies that tradition as stated and interpreted by the Eastern Orthodox Church in its dogma is final and authoritative, and any serious questioning of these is out of order; the issues which resulted in dogmatic decisions by the Church are not to be reopened.⁸ Further, from the Greek Orthodox viewpoint, "any agreement on faith must rest on the authority of the enactments of the seven Ecumenical Councils which represent the mind of the one undivided Church of antiquity and the subsequent tradition as safeguarded in the life of the Orthodox Church."⁹

Opposed to such a closed view of tradition and its dogmatic authority are numerous other statements. The report of Division I of the same conference at which the statement of the Greek Orthodox delegation just referred to was made states in part: "The unity we seek is not to be found in enforced conformity to a detailed, complete, unchangeable system of doctrine. . . . Freedom to interpret Christian truth in

⁷Ibid., p. 68.

⁸Evdokimoff, The Student World, XLIII (Second Quarter, 1949), 154.

⁹Kokkinakis, et al., Statement of the Greek Orthodox Church in the U.S.A. at the North American Faith and Order Study Conference, Oberlin, Ohio, 1957, p. 3.

varied ways . . . is part of Christian liberty."¹⁰ Cunliffe-Jones thinks of tradition as "the actual practice of the Church," and containing a mingling of truth and error, and, therefore, requiring judgment in the light of the Gospel.

For him, "the true tradition of the Church is not an additional source of doctrine, to be placed on an equality with the Bible; it is a means of interpreting the Bible."¹¹

Philippe Maury asserts further that "as Christians we are not bound by tradition, but only by the living Word of God."¹²

Sabatier points out that "tradition hands down everything, good and bad, error and truth, excellent habits and barbarous customs, generous sentiments and detestable institutions,"

and, therefore, criticism of tradition is a duty in order to prune the accretions and discern the value and truth of the tradition.¹³ Yearsley thinks of tradition essentially as

"the Divine revelation in Jesus Christ," which tradition is a "living and creative thing"; it is ". . . something for which each succeeding generation holds a responsibility, and to which it must make its contribution; something that each

¹⁰World Council of Churches, "In Faithfulness to the Eternal Gospel," Report of Division I of the North American Faith and Order Study Conference, Oberlin, Ohio, Sept., 1957, p. 3. (Mimeographed.)

¹¹Cunliffe-Jones, The Authority . . ., pp. 72-73.

¹²Philippe Maury, "The Nature of Our Christian Responsibility to the University," An Address delivered at the World's Student Christian Federation University Consultation, held at Monmouth, Illinois, August, 1954, The Student World, XLVII (First Quarter, 1955), 35.

¹³Sabatier, pp. 40, 49.

generation must become part of and make its own; something that must breathe again, with new life, in every generation."¹⁴ This can and must happen, but in our age of free inquiry and historical research, it is too much to ask that tradition not be restudied and re-evaluated in the light of the best we can discover about its origins and the most original meanings. In fact, only as a result of such study can tradition really come alive for the thoughtful person. Yearsley points out it would be obscurantism to ignore tradition,¹⁵ but this does not suggest that it should be accepted whole without careful evaluation, either.

There is also the question of whether the Bible or tradition is superior. We must, of course, recognize there was a Christian tradition before the New Testament was written and accepted as authoritative. The writings of the New Testament then became the earliest written source of our knowledge of the Christian tradition. Therefore, although these writings need not be accepted whole in blind faith without careful, evaluative study and comparison, they nevertheless become a highly authoritative source for determining what the most original Christian tradition was. Therefore, all later tradition must be brought to this bar of judgment. This was essentially what happened during the Protestant Reformation.

¹⁴Yearsley, The Congregational Quarterly, XXXIV (July, 1956), 225.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 226.

The point of the superiority of the Scriptures over tradition was dramatically made by Karl Barth in a Conference at Bossey where theologians were discussing "the right way of explaining the Bible." As Visser 't Hooft reports the incident:

One of the speakers was a great confessionalist. He had all the time before him the book of the confessions of his church, and he kept opening them and saying, "Our Confession number so and so says" Karl Barth was sitting next to him and became a little nervous. At a certain moment when the man had just opened the book again, Barth took it, closed it, and put the Greek New Testament on top of it. He didn't say anything, but the gesture was sufficiently eloquent.¹⁶

However, the statements of Old Catholic and Eastern Orthodox opinions stated and referred to above¹⁷ clearly mean that the Bible is subject to what have become the traditional interpretations of the Church. This brings the thoughtful person to an impasse again where he must make the best choice he can.

This problem of the authority of tradition was discussed at the Lund Faith and Order Conference in 1952. The discussion was stimulated by a paper by Florovsky and, as a result, a theological commission has been formed with Professor K. E. Skydsgaard as convener. This commission is to state distinctly the central Christian tradition.

Skydsgaard approaches the task by asking these questions:

Does tradition in all cases mean a secondary accretion to the apostolic proclamation (kerygma)? What authority does extra-biblical Tradition carry? How have our

¹⁶Visser 't Hooft, The Student World, XLIX (First Quarter, 1956), 50-51.

¹⁷Above, pp. 174-75, 177; see also pp. 172-73.

faith and practice been fashioned by traditions without our conscious recognition of the process?¹⁸

After asking these questions, Skydsgaard comments that "here is a field of study--biblical, theological, and historical--which offers much promise for the clarification of divisive factors at work among the churches today."¹⁹ This is ample testimony of diversity of opinion about the "status and influence" of tradition; it also illustrates the search for evidence upon which to base a sound statement in the matter. Thus, the sources will be re-examined--"biblical, theological, and historical"--we hope, with honest and free inquiry. The hope is that we may come nearer the central truth, and each other, when this is done.

The Authority of the Ministry

The question of the authority of the ministry is a most practical question for it is in relation to the minister in a local church that a person is most likely to experience a claimed religious authority, whether it be an authority of dogmatic pronouncement, superior knowledge, moral influence, or administrative responsibility. But what is the nature of the authority of those in the Christian ministry? What is the source of this authority and how inclusive should it be?

All Christians will agree that the ultimate authority

13. ¹⁸Skydsgaard, The Ecumenical Review, VI (Oct., 1953),

¹⁹Ibid.

is God, but here the agreement ends. In the "Study Guide" prepared for the Fourth National Triennial Conference of the Interseminary Movement at Oberlin, Ohio, August 27 to September 1, 1957, the first section deals with "The Authority of the Ministry," and quotes statements which pose the question. On the one side is Luther's statement that every Christian is a priest and has ". . . the same authority in regard to the word and the sacraments, although no one has the right to administer them without the consent of the members of his church or by the call of the majority."²⁰ Then the reader is asked whether he agrees ". . . that the authority of the ministry inheres in the office to which the minister is called by the congregation rather than in the order of the priesthood into which he is admitted by the bishop."²¹ On the other side, Father Bulgakov is quoted as saying at Lausanne that

. . . the charismatic authority of the Episcopate is not an idea but a fact. . . . This authority alone conserves and fortifies the fullness of the charismatic life in the Church and restores to the right path such groups as have strayed outside Church unity into isolation.²²

Gustav Aulen thinks of the ministry as "a divine Commission" since "its basis is the commission of Christ . . ." Nevertheless, Christ's authority ". . . is not a personal

²⁰Martin Luther, quoted by Hyslop et al., p. 1.

²¹Ibid., p. 2.

²²Father Bulgakov, quoted by Hyslop et al., p. 2.

possession of the minister."²³ Then what is the authority of the ministry? Is it Christ's authority handed down to the ministry and given special guidance by the Holy Spirit so it will not be misused?

The problem of apostolic succession was discussed earlier,²⁴ but additional consideration must be given to it here. The basic issue is well stated when Henri d'Espine, Professor of Pastoral Theology in the Theological Faculty of the University of Geneva, states that, to Protestants,

. . . the ministry, which they firmly believe to be the will of Christ, is not a priesthood but a shepherdship, by means of which the Great Shepherd desires His flock to be fed. Christ raises up these human shepherds by calling men to the ministry, and it is this Divine vocation, this immediate action upon them by the Glorified Lord, which makes them shepherds. The consecration they receive by prayer and the laying-on of hands constitutes not a transmission of powers but an act of the Church whereby it recognizes the vocation addressed to them, and receives them from the hand of its Lord as lawful shepherds. By its prayer it asks of God to invest them with all the spiritual force demanded for the carrying out of their duty, and by the laying-on of hands, acting this time as the instrument of Christ in the faith that its prayer has been heard and answered, it consecrates them to their office. . . . All this makes clear the inaccuracy of stating that in consecration by Apostolic Succession the authority comes from above, while in consecration as understood by the Protestant churches it comes from below. In both it comes from above, since it is always Christ Who bestows it, but whereas to the Catholic churches it was bestowed upon certain men on a certain day by Christ in the period of His bodily existence and has since been transmitted from consecrate to consecrate in a manner which might be described as horizontal, to the Protestant churches it

²³Gustav Aulen, The Faith of the Christian Church, trans. from 4th Swedish edition by E. H. Wahlstrom and G. E. Arden (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 409, quoted by Hyslop, et al., pp. 2-3.

²⁴Above, pp. 157-64.

is bestowed in each case by the Glorified Lord, by a communication which might be described as vertical.²⁵

According to this statement, the issue is not who bestows authority on the minister, but how and when. In fact, this statement by d'Espine thinks of the authority as coming directly from Christ. This concept would also tend to make a minister less subservient in spirit and more directly responsible to Christ.

Douglas Horton, Minister of the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches for many years and now Dean of the Harvard Divinity School, calls attention to the two aspects of episcopal ordination as viewed by those who feel the necessity of apostolic succession. Episcopal ordination ". . . is an outward act performed by the bishop in historical line, but it also accompanies and is accompanied by a spiritual authorization to the one ordained to do the work of a minister of Jesus Christ."²⁶ Horton suggests another lineage than "the historic episcopal line," when he speaks of non-episcopal lineage--"a historical lineage straight from Christ"--and states that "this is the succession of the whole church."²⁷ It could be added that there is no reason the Holy Spirit could not guide the Church in this way

²⁵Henri d'Espine, "The Apostolic Succession as an Ecumenical Issue--A Protestant View," The Ecumenical Review, IV (Jan., 1952), 155-56. (This article is really a reply to the article by the Anglican, the Rev. Francis Gray, appearing in the same issue. Gray's thinking is referred to above, see pp. 157-58.)

²⁶Douglas Horton, "Episcopal and Non-Episcopal Ministries," The Ecumenical Review, VIII (Apr., 1956), 234-35.

²⁷Ibid.

as well as through the lineage of apostolic succession. But this would be challenged from experience by those in favor of insisting upon apostolic succession. This pragmatic consideration is expressed by Francis Gray when he states that

. . . many upholders of Apostolic succession would quite simply argue that if it is rejected and any Christian is free to set up as a freelance teacher, or if groups of people are allowed to choose and appoint their own ministers of religion, there is a risk that an endless variety of peculiar and unsound doctrines will be propagated and imposed on simple folk.²⁸

Here it should be pointed out that the fact there is risk involved doesn't invalidate the claim against the necessity of apostolic succession; recalling the Middle Ages, it is clear that the risk is not all on one side. The fact is that in our day, the freedom to choose one's church and minister is here to a considerable degree, and it would be wiser to train and educate our lay people rather than fear for their use of freedom and try to keep freedom from them, thus setting the stage for reaction to be harder and go to greater extremes when the authoritarian bonds are broken. We might also ask Gray and the supporters of apostolic succession how they would proceed to prevent the freedom they fear short of physical force and legal prescriptions limiting freedom of religion and faith. Also, the fear of the risks of freedom may suggest a motive behind the insistence upon apostolic succession--there ought to be clear

²⁸Gray, The Ecumenical Review, IV (Jan., 1952), 143-44.

and unmistakable authority delegated from Christ. Sabatier asserts that "the dogma of apostolical succession did not make the bishops, the bishops made the dogma."²⁹ This does not question the need for organization and specification of responsibilities, but it does call in question the claim of a legal transmission of divine power and authority rather than a spiritual and limited transmission of power and authority.

Strachan would add to the above considerations the possibility that the laity has often wanted to be free of the burden of responsibility for their religious thinking, and he speculates that ". . . the laity have probably had far more to do with the development of the idea of the 'Catholic' Church than the clergy."³⁰ The laity may have been entirely too willing to have the bishop assure them and pronounce forgiveness for them.

But what is the evidence from within the New Testament and from a study of the history of the early Christian community? First, it would seem clear that the local congregations of early Christians started out with considerable freedom. It is even interesting that Peter was criticized for his freedom in relation to gentile converts and was either called upon, or felt the need to explain his actions.³¹

²⁹Sabatier, p. 91.

³⁰Strachan, pp. 105-107.

³¹Acts 11:1-18.

But the circumcision party became concerned about the freedom of the gentile converts at Antioch and sent Barnabas to check on the matter.³² Further, Paul finally successfully maintained the freedom of gentile converts from the Jewish ritualistic laws.³³ Although there were attempts by some of the Christians in Jerusalem to control the Christian freedom of gentile converts, it is significant that no apostle, not even Peter, is appealed to as a judge or bearer of authority with respect to the dispute. Rather, the discussion and debate bring forth experiences and interpretations which indicate and try to state what the Gospel means in relation to the problem of Jewish ritual practice; the issue does not bring forth an appeal to any earthly authority in any person. Nevertheless, the Catholic side would claim that Peter had been appointed as the first leader of all Christians, and would cite Matthew 16:18 where Peter is reported to have been appointed. But the authenticity of this passage, as well as Matthew 18:18 are seriously questioned by many scholars.³⁴ This only highlights the differing opinions on this vital issue. In fact, the debate has brought forth six books within the last few years dealing with this

³²Acts 11:19-26.

³³See especially the book of Galatians.

³⁴See Major, Manson, and Wright, pp. 109-110, 493-97; Edwin Lewis, p. 160. However, compare Oscar Cullman, Peter Disciple--Apostle--Martyr, trans. F. V. Filson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 158-212, where Cullman supports belief in the genuineness of the passage but maintains there was not to be and could not be any successor in any sense comparable to the Pope.

problem. In an article in The Ecumenical Review for October, 1957, Gotthard Nygren briefly reviews these six books and comments as follows:

We would say that too much energy is wasted in describing the theory of succession accepted and taken for granted in each church or theological party. On the other hand not enough attention is paid to clarifying basic theological assumptions on which the various theories are built and comparing those assumptions. The fundamental theological aspects of the discussion are being neglected.

Furthermore, the various pieces of historical evidence on which the theories of succession must necessarily be based are often presented in a way that is unsatisfactory from the point of view of a historian.³⁵

With this kind of debate going on, it is not likely that the problem could be solved conclusively by this writer, but this does force those who live during the debate to make their own at least tentative decisions.

But what do scholars think about the authority of the ministry as portrayed by the writings of the early church leaders, including the New Testament? Calhoun recognizes the difficulty of describing with sureness and clarity the ". . . order and discipline in the New Testament Church . . ." but states they were ". . . a factor of growing importance . . ."³⁶ He suggests it is likely the early leadership ". . . took form initially from a number

³⁵Gotthard Nygren, "Apostolic Succession," Reviews of six recent books in this field, The Ecumenical Review, X (Oct., 1957), 97. (Two of these books are in German and four of them in English; one of these six is by a Roman Catholic and four of them by Anglicans. The reviewer is Lecturer in Dogmatics and Symbolics at the Theological Faculty, University of Lund, Sweden.)

³⁶Calhoun, "Christ and the Church," p. 13.

of existential factors in combination . . ." and by implication and silence does not seem to think of the concept or practice of apostolic succession as originally a part of the early Christian Church.³⁷ Calhoun also states that "it is well known that the proliferation of irregular versions of Christian preaching, teaching, and living prompted closer control all along the line . . ."³⁸ With this closer control came ". . . exaltation of episcopal authority at least in the local congregation . . ."³⁹ Knox states that "there can be little doubt that by the end of the second century most, if not all, of the churches, although they may also have had their bodies of elders, were ruled primarily by single bishops . . ."⁴⁰ He also points out the difficulty of knowing for sure just what the patterns of administration and authority were. He thinks that a majority of the churches at the beginning of the second century were ". . . apparently governed by boards of elders . . ." but that "a considerable number" had ". . . accepted the monarchical-bishop pattern."⁴¹ Knox thinks the episcopate developed out of the needs of the time and that the first bishops were chosen by the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Knox, p. 120.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 120, 122.

congregations or elders of the congregation, although he also recognizes some one or several of Paul's deputies, appointed perhaps by Paul, exercised oversight of Paul's churches after Paul was unable to.⁴²

But some other writers would emphasize the authority exercised by the apostles, especially Paul. R. R. Williams stresses Paul's authoritative attitude in dealing with the churches which he founded.⁴³ Williams considers that "the ministry of the Church is divinely given, and, therefore, possesses in some sense, the authority of the Divine Giver."⁴⁴ But Williams also recognizes that "a relative element comes in owing to the temporal and human character of the ministry."⁴⁵ He calls attention to ". . . the practical fact that episcopal ministries exhibit precisely the same variations in effectiveness as do the non-episcopal."⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Williams thinks that Scripture states "that Christ extended His full legislative authority to His apostles . . ." and refers to Matthew 18:18 and John 20:21-23 to substantiate his opinion.⁴⁷ And so, if we followed the discussion of Williams, we would again be involved in the question of apostolic succession!

⁴²Ibid., pp. 123-25.

⁴³R. R. Williams, Authority in the Apostolic Age (London: SCM Press LTD, 1950), pp. 11-23.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 138.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 139.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 141.

It is clear that there is not full agreement on the extent and kind of authority exercised by the ministry in the first Christian century. However, it does seem in this case that those attempting to uphold the strict necessity of apostolic succession would have more difficulty than those who read early Christian history as showing a gradual, unpremeditated, and undesignated development toward episcopacy. But this might be interpreted by others as just the opinion of the writer, and they would insist upon their own opinion, based on their own experience and study.

The authority of the ministry is also approached from another viewpoint--that of moral influence. Williams stresses this point, even though it may involve institutions.⁴⁸ Bishop Neill also points this up by saying that unless people outside a church respect the individual minister as "a holy man of God" the minister is not doing his job.⁴⁹ Brunner emphasizes this same viewpoint in a negative way when he writes that "not the hostility of the unbelieving world, but clerical parsonic ecclesiasticism has ever been the greatest enemy of the Christian message and of brotherhood rooted in Christ."⁵⁰ Thus is emphasized Jesus' teaching that we can distinguish true and false

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁹Stephen Neill, On the Ministry, p. 10, quoted by Hyslop, et al., p. 3.

⁵⁰Emil Brunner, The Misunderstanding of the Church, p. 117, quoted by Hyslop, et al., p. 3.

prophets by their fruits.⁵¹ This is inescapable; to a high degree the minister must live the message he preaches. At least this is one area where there is major agreement.

As is evident from this consideration of the authority of the ministry, perhaps centering in the debate over the question of apostolic succession, there is considerable divergence of opinion and the suggestion that more objective study and research on the question is needed. Therefore, the individual is forced again to choose between rival claims, and in so doing, appeal to some other authority.

⁵¹Matt. 7:15-20; cf. Matt. 12:33-35 and Lk. 6:43-46.

CHAPTER X

THE AUTHORITY OF REVELATION AND
THE HOLY SPIRITThe Authority of Revelation

If a claim of an experience of the presence of God or of a direct communication from God could be unmistakably authenticated and infallibly interpreted and stated, what tremendous authority it would have! Then we could believe it without any risk of being wrong. But immediately the question becomes one of determining whether a claimed revelation actually is revelation. But what is revelation?

Is revelation primarily the confrontation of a person by the Supreme Person we call God? Is revelation the giving by God and the receiving by man of information or understanding that man could not discover without special action by God? Or is God acting continually to enable man to become aware of His presence as soon as he responds sufficiently in the right spirit? Does God call special people to specific tasks, or is His call present constantly for all who will recognize His call and respond? These and many more questions could be asked and debated, but for the purposes of this study it is necessary only to explore the problem long enough to see the impasse to which the discussion leads.

Recent discussions of the problem of revelation

often attempt to draw a distinction between the concept of revelation as essentially the communication by God of Himself in personal encounters with human persons and the concept of revelation as the giving by God and the receiving by man of information or understanding that man could not discover without special action by God.¹ The question is whether God communicates Himself by the personal meeting of a human person, or whether He gives man information and understanding. Or does the information and understanding come as a result of a direct personal confrontation of a human person by God?

If in his higher nature man is akin to God in a way which animals are not, then some kind of revelation should be possible. The mysteries and problems of the knowledge of persons and communication between persons are ever before us. Somehow we are aware of ourselves and of other persons. Somehow we remember, reflect, cogitate, form attitudes, try to plan, and seek to understand and communicate with other persons.

When someone claims he has experienced a direct confrontation by God, or that God has communicated with him, we ask for some kind of validation of the claim. In the Gospels there are warnings against false prophets,² and the early Christians soon learned that they must "test the spirits."³

¹John Baillie, The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), pp. 3-13, 62-82. (This book consists of the Bampton Lectures in America delivered at Columbia University in July, 1954 and considerably revised and expanded.) See also Georgia Harkness, Foundations of Christian Knowledge, pp. 73-85.

²Matt. 7:15-20; cf. Matt. 12:33-35 and Lk. 6:43-46.

³I John 4:1.

In like manner, the Jewish religious leaders at the time of Jesus asked for some special validation of his authority to teach and act as he did.⁴

But how can a claim of revelation be validated?

Burrows discusses four ways "the authenticity of the revelation given in the Bible has been thought to be established . . ."⁵ He lists these four ways as follows: ". . . by competent and reliable testimony, by evidence of divine origin, by the way in which it was received as distinguishing it from knowledge gained in other ways, and by its own inherent truth and worth."⁶ His conclusion is that "a frank appraisal of each of these in turn will show that the first three are fallacious or at best inconclusive, leaving the fourth as the only tenable ground of assurance."⁷ This certainly does not solve the problem once and for all, for we immediately face the problem--who determines whether there is "inherent truth and worth" in a claimed revelation. Furthermore, all evidence and testimony must have some base in the individual concerned to help him make the necessary choices. Thus, the individual must decide what he thinks is a valid claim to revelation and what is not. The recent effort through the Study Department of the World Council of Churches should be helpful but the attempt to arrive at an understanding of what

⁴Mk. 1:11-12; Matt. 16:4; Matt. 12:38-42 and Lk. 11:29-32.

⁵Burrows, p. 16.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

it means to interpret the Bible and the revelation it contains or to which it witnesses resulted in a symposium with widely differing views presented and a joint statement of "Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of the Bible."⁸ This symposium is a worthy effort, but the individual still must make his decision concerning the validity and meaning of the claimed revelation.

In his recent book, Ground to Stand On, Dr. Otwell speaks of revelation as a "co-operative venture between God and man."⁹ He speaks of God as "entering the prophet's consciousness" and creating ". . . the integration out of which the prophet then thought, felt, and spoke."¹⁰ He recognizes that, because of the human involvement, such revelation is not infallible, and he asserts that ". . . if revelation be infallible knowledge, man knows no revelation."¹¹ Otwell then calls attention to the transformed lives of men through the ages who have had a "direct experience of God," and suggests that ". . . Jesus, the apostles, and such great figures in Christian history as Augustine and the reformers . . ." are part of a "prophetic tradition."¹²

⁸World Council of Churches, Biblical Authority for Today: A World Council of Churches Symposium on 'The Biblical Authority for the Churches' Social and Political Message Today, Alan Richardson and W. Schweitzer, eds. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951).

⁹Otwell, p. 187.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 190.

This ". . . 'prophetic Tradition,' since it is a cumulative record of past knowledge of the Encounter, establishes for us a norm by which we can judge the direct revelation claimed in our own age."¹³ But still we must test the claims, and the individual must decide whose evaluations are valid and whose are not--the individual still must make the decision.

Edwin Lewis stresses what he considers ". . . the fact that the self-revelation of God to men to which the Bible bears witness was integrated with the processes of history."¹⁴ Strachan also recognizes ". . . the naturalness of the means by which the knowledge of God has come to us."¹⁵ Therefore, it follows that ". . . there is no absoluteness and immutability in Divine Revelation, which would exclude all possibility of modification or addition."¹⁶ And so we arrive at the same impasse again: if the "Divine Revelation" is not absolute and immutable, we face the problem of determining what claim of a revelation is true.

Some people think that revelation is primarily contained or reported in the Bible. P. J. Mann thinks of the Bible in this way and asserts that this revelation in the Scriptures serves primarily ". . . for the maintenance and transmission of tradition."¹⁷ This revelation was appealed

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Lewis, p. 115.

¹⁵Strachan, p. 181.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Mann, The Ecumenical Review, I (Summer, 1949), 393.

to by the Church to refute the heretics.¹⁸ However, the claimed revelation within the Bible must also be evaluated.

Rufus Jones asserts that "Revelation literature stands or falls with the power of its appeal to the minds of men age after age."¹⁹ He refers to the "vital principle" by which Coleridge evaluated the Bible as follows:

His test of its power is the way it searches the depths of his inmost being and finds him. "The words of the Bible," he said, "find me at greater depths of my being than any other book does." And then he goes on to conclude: "Whatever finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of having proceeded from the Holy Spirit."²⁰

This is the test of experience. We must test the validity of any claimed revelation by the total of our experience, including our study and the thinking of others as it has become a part of us. But is this finding us the action of the Holy Spirit as Coleridge would seem to suggest?

The Authority of the Holy Spirit

What is the Holy Spirit? Is it an inner witness? Is it the image of God within us functioning when affirmed by us? Is it actually a part of the God-head? Before the question of the authority of the Holy Spirit can be answered, we must know what the Holy Spirit is. But here again we encounter difficulties. As Rufus Jones observes, ". . . of

¹⁸Ibid., p. 394.

¹⁹Rufus M. Jones, Pathways to the Reality of God (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), p. 180.

²⁰Ibid., citing Coleridge, Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit.

all the aspects of the endless trinitarian problem the one that has received the least measure of clarity and elucidation is the nature of the Spirit."²¹ Canon Raven, in his 1952 Gifford Lectures, refers to the same problem,²² and Glynmor John writes in The Congregational Quarterly that the Spirit became imprisoned in the hierarchy and authoritarianism of the Church for 1500 years.²³ Theodore Wedel, Dean of the College of Preachers, Washington Cathedral, Washington, D.C., also notes the puzzling confusion in "the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the history of Christian thought."²⁴ It is not to be expected that this writer could or should state a doctrine of the Holy Spirit which would be even reasonably satisfactory for all people. However, let us look briefly at the function of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is thought of primarily as leading the Christian. Edward T. Ramsdell, Professor of Systematic Theology in Garrett Biblical Institute, thinks of the Holy Spirit as leading us to see more of the implications of God's love than have been seen in the past; through the Holy Spirit we can be guided with an open mind into greater understanding

²¹Jones, pp. 197-98.

²²Canon Raven, cited by Glynmor John, "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in our Ecclesiology," The Congregational Quarterly, XXXIV (Jan., 1956), 10.

²³John, The Congregational Quarterly, XXXIV (Jan., 1956), 10.

²⁴Theodore O. Wedel, "The Body-Spirit Paradox of the Church," The Ecumenical Review, IV (July, 1952), 350.

of truth.²⁵ Outler speaks of being ". . . led by the Spirit into the Unity we seek . . ."²⁶ A. G. Hebert thinks of the Holy Spirit as guiding us in the interpretation of the Bible, and adds that ". . . the Holy Ghost always has fresh things to say, in each day and generation."²⁷ Cunliffe-Jones considers the Holy Spirit as communicating the Gospel to us, ". . . and that the understanding of this Gospel is a human response also inspired by the Holy Spirit."²⁸ But here the problem becomes more acute. The varying interpretations of the Bible are ample evidence that what different people think the Holy Spirit tells them, or leads them to think, do not agree. Thus, either side in the fundamentalist-liberal controversy may appeal to the guidance of the Spirit as authenticating its interpretation of the Bible. It is hard to escape the suggestion that many unworthy appeals are made for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the individual can also appeal to the Holy Spirit in justifying his decision. But let us look at the Biblical evidence concerning the Holy Spirit.

In his Outline of Biblical Theology, Millar Burrows surveys the evidence within the Bible on this subject.

²⁵Edward T. Ramsdell, "Communication from a Christian Perspective," Religious Education, L (Sept.-Oct., 1955), 338.

²⁶Albert C. Outler, "Our Common History as Christians," Address at the North American Faith and Order Study Conference, Oberlin, Ohio, Sept., 1957, p. 7. (Mimeographed.)

²⁷Hebert, The Student World, XLII, (First Quarter, 1949), 115.

²⁸Cunliffe-Jones, The Authority . . ., p. 89.

Burrows brings out ". . . that the earliest Hebrew conception of the Spirit of Yahweh was related to the impersonal conceptions of primitive dynamism . . . as a force that comes suddenly and inexplicably upon particular individuals at particular times."²⁹ Burrows points out that Mark 3:29 ". . . implies that Jesus' work is the work of the Spirit, and that to attribute it to Beelzebub is blasphemy" and that "the eschatological discourse promises the Spirit to the disciples in persecution."³⁰ It is also suggested that the Spirit may become a permanent part of the Christian believer. Burrows writes that "Paul's special contribution . . . is his idea of the Spirit as the characteristic, sustaining, permanent power of the Christian life."³¹ Paul's usage suggests that his idea of the Spirit is close ". . . to the Hebrew and early Christian conception of the active power of God, now identified with the influence and activity of Jesus."³² The Gospel of John reports Jesus as promising the sending of the Counselor, and also speaks often of the Spirit; the Spirit is repeatedly referred to as a guide and agent of revelation.³³ We could summarize this Biblical evidence as testifying to the experience of

²⁹Burrows, p. 74.

³⁰Ibid., p. 76.

³¹Ibid., p. 77.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

men who felt they were led and directed by the Spirit of God. It might be better to say that the term Holy Spirit stands for the impingement on our lives of the Persons of God and Christ, and in unknown ways enlightens our minds and hearts.

If a human being is in some sense akin to God and created in His image, then some kind of direct communication should be possible. But this still leaves us with the problem of recognizing what is actually the guidance of the Spirit and what is merely a stirred up state of the organism. Knox calls attention to the experience of "feeling" the Spirit in the early church and that this "feeling" was self-authenticating.³⁴ However, the serious question can be raised whether the "feeling" is the authenticating mark of the presence of the Spirit. A person can feel joy for various different reasons, and people can induce various states of ecstasy if they so desire.³⁵

This discussion of the problems of revelation and the Holy Spirit should at least illustrate the impossibility of any substantial agreement on a particular interpretation of revelation or the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the authoritative answer to the problem of authority in the

³⁴Knox, p. 57.

³⁵The "Spiritual Exercises" of Ignatius of Loyola are a good example; see below, pp. 306-308. See also James Bissett Pratt, The Religious Consciousness, A Psychological Study, Chapter 18, "The Ecstasy" (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951 [first printed, 1920], pp. 384-429.

Church. Every claim to revelation or inspiration and guidance by the Holy Spirit is a human claim interpreting experience and must be evaluated in comparison with other experience. Therefore, we must go beyond the claims of revelation and guidance by the Holy Spirit to find the actual functioning basis of authority in religion. This we shall try to do in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XI

THE AUTHORITY OF TRUTH AND EXPERIENCE

The Authority of Truth

Regardless of whether Pilate actually asked Jesus, "What is Truth?", this question is one of the most basic questions man can ask and answer. The question may be composed of many parts, yet these parts must be coherent and constitute the larger question, "What is Truth?" The question is complicated by the diversity and relativity of all attempted statements of truth, as has been illustrated in the previous chapters of this study. Yet we must use the word, or some other word for the same meaning. Life for each individual is a continuing experience, or series of experiences, which faces each person with the problem of interpreting what experience tells him about life. The human person is faced with the experience of events which on the surface do not seem congruent or understandable; he is faced with contradictory statements about the same event, and, if knowing what actually happened really matters to him, he will naturally try to find some way to determine which statement is true, or nearer true.

Further, as a self-conscious being with memory and the ability to anticipate and plan to some degree for the

future, the human person very naturally may ask the question of the meaning of life. Gordon W. Allport, Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, speaks of the "pursuit of meaning" as part of a religious "sentiment" which is natural to human beings, although there are great individual differences in curiosity and ability.¹ Allport also speaks of "the bias of intelligibility and the bias of optimism" as being normal in human beings and not just wishful thinking.² The human person tries to state what he thinks is true about his life and, therefore, is the truth. This need for meaning and interpretation includes the total universe of which man is in some sense aware. John B. Noss comments that "credulous and superficial though . . . primitive myth-makers may seem, they have really been engaged in a form of rudimentary science, the spinning of an hypothesis that puts two and two together through a synthesis of the soundest available knowledge at the time."³ Through man's self-conscious ability to be aware of sequences of events and to remember happenings in chronological order, man is able to perceive cause and effect relationships and to form conclusions. With the questions of origins and meanings and

¹Gordon W. Allport, The Individual and His Religion, A Psychological Interpretation (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), pp. 16-18.

²Ibid., pp. 20-23.

³John B. Noss, Man's Religions (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 24. (Noss is Professor of Philosophy at Franklin and Marshall College.)

values occurring to man, he very naturally attempts to understand his experiences of life and the universe as best he can. Because there must be some way of designating what is considered to be the ultimate meaning and reality in the life and universe that we know, the best that we think we know becomes spoken of as truth with other details being known as true.

Thus the term truth refers to either a conclusion or a working hypothesis which is the means by which a person interprets and lives his life in relation to the universe as he knows it. Bertocci states the same point by saying that "for the word 'truth' to have any meaning at all, it must refer to some organization of ideas (as opposed to other possible ones) which has been chosen in accordance with some criterion, to represent (in some sense) reality."⁴ But all references to truth and attempts to define it are interpretations of experience and must submit to the experiences of others to test their validity as an interpretation of life and the universe. Even claims of knowledge of God and His self-revelation must submit to this bar of judgment.

But what is the authority of truth over a person? Certainly it is not absolute in the sense of always receiving the unreserved loyalty of a person and, therefore, appropriate decision and action. Psychologists have helped popularize rationalization as an unconscious dishonesty

⁴Bertocci, p. 22.

that admitted truth over that person. The person may try to refute the claim, but in the act of doing it, he recognizes the claim.

But what is the nature of the authority which truth has over us? Strachan speaks of ". . . the direct witness of truth in our own souls . . ." ⁵ Rufus Jones refers to truth as ". . . that strange characteristic of absoluteness that attaches to our logical judgments." ⁶ Robert S. Bilheimer thinks "the rise to influence of the ecumenical movement has been due in large part to its success in the creation of a body of agreed conviction, conviction which by its inherent truth has been recognized as authoritative and of value." ⁷ Thus the authority of truth is considered to be inherent to our nature and our minds. In this spirit Sabatier asserts that ". . . it is truth which makes authority, not the contrary," and if anything is proved false, then the authority it had is lost. ⁸ Jones also speaks of ". . . the authority of truth and beauty and goodness . . ." as ". . . power to produce inward conviction in other minds." ⁹ This authority of truth is a logical necessity whenever a claim or a statement is admitted as truth. It is true there are less important truths and more important truths. It is

⁵Strachan, p. 22.

⁶Jones, p. 73.

⁷Bilheimer, The Ecumenical Review, IV (July, 1952), 356.

⁸Sabatier, p. 144.

⁹Jones, p. 35.

true that red, and not black, is used as the color for stop lights. This is important for us to know, but it is not necessarily a part of the nature of life. It is true that a child needs love for normal emotional and spiritual development,¹⁰ but, rather than a detail dependent on human decision, this is a truth about human nature which we can do nothing about; we can only recognize it and its authority over life, and proceed accordingly.

When an attempt is made to state what the ultimate authority is, there is the question of whether truth should be designated as the ultimate authority, whether the Christian God should be so designated, or whether the term ultimate reality should be used. It really makes little difference. Truth and ultimate reality sound cold unless filled with the concept of spiritual personality. Yet any attempted definition of truth, ultimate reality, or God is limited and fallible. Thus, it might be better to speak of a person's concept of truth or God as the immediate authority, recognizing that this authority is both inherent in God, or truth, and yet does not function properly unless man in freedom recognizes and chooses to submit to this authority. From the viewpoint of man, it can be stated that the immediate authority for him is his view of what is the most complete truth he knows about the universe and

¹⁰See above, pp. 33-34.

life; this includes his concept of God. This also recognizes that the eventual degree of suitability of his concept of truth will be dependent upon the testimony of additional experience and evidence. Further, this does not ignore the possibility that a man's concept of truth may be considered adequate and yet eventually be overthrown by the ultimate authority or Truth of God. For example, a man may persist in his belief that there is no God, and yet have his concept of truth and the authority it had for him overthrown by an encounter with God, here or hereafter. Or a man may become a legalist in his religious concept and ultimately have this concept and its authority overthrown by God's requirement for a spirit of merciful love and service. Thus, the ultimate authority is the Truth or God, but the immediate authority is the highest concept of life that a man considers to be true. But the highest choice a man can make is to be loyal to the Truth or God as he can best conceive and understand it. He is held responsible by the authority of the ultimate Truth or Fact or Person, but his immediate functioning authority is the highest understanding of this Ultimate that he has. Arthur W. Munk recognizes these two aspects of ultimate and immediate authority. He comments in a note that

. . . truth really has two aspects: the timely and relative, that which is at any one time and can be ascertained from the interpretation of a limited area of facts; and that which is timeless, ultimate, and which can be dimly seen only from a synoptic view of the whole. The first might be any specific historical

event or situation; the deeper ultimate meaning of history as a whole illustrates the second.¹¹

This discussion has led us to the problem of how even relative concepts of truth can be attained or received and evaluated. How can man know Truth and God? The next section is addressed to this problem.

The Authority of Experience

The term experience in this study is used in the broad sense of all that happens to persons of which they can be consciously aware. Separate incidents may be referred to as experiences, or in the singular as an experience; experience as the general term stands for all the experiences of life, including thoughts and actions of all kinds. Certainly many experiences are interrelated, if not directly to each other, at least in the life of the person. In a very real sense a person is his experiences--he is what he makes of them and what further experiences he chooses to encounter. Before a child becomes cognizant of himself as an individual, his experiences have accumulated and influenced him. The babies who experience lack of affection and, therefore, die or become neurotic have had experiences before they have any self-consciousness or awareness of themselves as individuals, and these experiences have been authoritative for them--authoritative to the extent of determining whether or what kind of future

¹¹Munk, The Journal of Bible and Religion, XX (Oct., 1952), 259.

there would be for them, at least in this earthly life.¹²

As a person comes to awareness of himself as an individual and can evaluate and at least partially choose and control his experiences, he can choose what he considers to be true and to what he will give recognition as having authority over him. But a person is still dependent upon experiences; without them he would not be a human being. And without specifically human experiences, he would not develop as a human being. This is well illustrated by the two famous wolf children in India who lived as part of a wolf family during an important formative period of their lives. The children behaved as wolves in so far as they could, and did not develop as distinctively human.¹³ The case of the boy living by himself in the forests of southern France is another good example.¹⁴ He had not learned to talk and lived as only an animal, although he was eleven or twelve years old when found. These children were handicapped by the lack of distinctively human experience and thus could not develop as human beings. The limitation of their experience was authoritative for them.

¹²See above, pp. 33-34.

¹³W. N. Kellogg and L. A. Kellogg, The Ape and the Child, A Study of Environmental Influence Upon Early Behavior (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1933), pp. 4-5, citing P. C. Squires "'Wolf Children' of India," American Journal of Psychology, XXXVIII (1927), 313-15 and W. N. Kellogg, "More About the 'Wolf Children' of India," American Journal of Psychology, XLV (1931), 508-509.

¹⁴Kellogg and Kellogg, p. 1, citing J. G. M. Itard, The Wild Boy of Aveyron, trans. G. and M. Humphrey (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1932).

In religion also, man is dependent upon his experiences to give him the basic data and evidence. Bertocci comments that man ". . . can get nowhere in his thinking about man without evaluating all kinds of evidence which reside nowhere else than in his own experience."¹⁵

Dr. Otwell speaks of religious experience as ". . . the reception of stimuli presumed to have been set in motion by the presence, in our environment, of a reality."¹⁶

Strachan thinks in similar terms by defining religious experience as ". . . God-consciousness, an awareness of a personal relationship with a living superhuman power," and he assumes ". . . that Christian experience of God, as a relationship of personal communion, is the highest variety of religious experience we know."¹⁷ But Strachan also has a broader concept of religious experience when he speaks of ". . . the appeal of beauty, the compulsion of truth on our minds . . . [and] the zeal for social justice . . . " as all "forms of religious experience" whose ". . . initial impulse comes from God . . . "¹⁸ In the light of these thoughts, we might include as religious experience every experience which is conceived of as being related to God. If a person thinks of the universe as the creation of God, then awe and wonder in the contemplation of that universe

¹⁵Bertocci, pp. 11-12.

¹⁶Otwell, p. 49.

¹⁷Strachan, p. 13.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 23.

and its Creator as illustrated by the writers of Psalms 8 and 19 is surely a religious experience. If a person considers life to be a gift and an opportunity given by God, then all of life may be seen as religious experience. If a person lives as Jesus did with a constant orientation toward God, then all life is religious. If all life is lived in relation to God, then all life is religious experience. This does not imply that all religious experience is of the same level and intensity. The Encounters with God as referred to by Dr. Otwell¹⁹ and documented by William James in his famous Varieties of Religious Experience are certainly of the highest type of religious experience. But living with a constant awareness of being a child of God and a servant in His Kingdom is also religious experience. However, for this discussion, it is helpful to speak of specific religious experiences wherever possible. Before a constant religious attitude can pervade all of life and make it a continuing religious experience, the process has to be started. This could be called the ground of faith.

Religious experience is the ground of faith. Without some experience which is considered to be a result of relation to the Ultimate Reality, there is no distinctive religious experience. Whether this is stimulated by preaching or discussion or a growing conviction of the existence and action of God is not important. Whether a

¹⁹ Otwell, pp. 48-51.

person has been guilty of horrendous sins or sees his earlier minor mistakes as sins after he comes to a realization of accountability to God does not matter either. The basic religious experience is the confrontation of a person with the claim of God upon his life. This may come from the feeling that God has suddenly visited one with His presence or it may come from the growing conviction that God is speaking to one through the Bible and through the Church and its ministers and teachers. Once one has felt this claim impinging upon him, it cannot be completely forgotten. One may attempt to flee from God as Francis Thompson describes it in "The Hound of Heaven," but the experience lives on; and the experience becomes authoritative. This experience of God in the universe and His call to one becomes the most basic experience in life--it is authoritative from the human side.

The importance of this basic religious experience is acknowledged by many writers. Although P. T. Forsyth insists that "all authority must be external, in some real sense, or it is none,"²⁰ he also recognizes the place of religious experience as absolutely basic for a person's accepting this "ground of certitude" from outside himself. He writes:

If we are asking the soul's question, and not merely raising problems in religion, it is only a religious experience of the whole man that gives us our outlet,

²⁰P. T. Forsyth, The Principle of Authority in Relation to Certainty, Sanctity and Society--An Essay in the Philosophy of Experimental Religion (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, [1913]), p. 306.

only a remorseless moral realism, only the personal experience by the guilty conscience of a holy doom and grace. In the absence of that realism and that experience we do not know to what we can appeal. But to one who has really gone through this life-experience the fact of such a salvation is the truest thing we can know; it is more of a fact even than the soul it saves.²¹

Some kind of an experience of God and His claim upon one-- either a direct experience or one mediated through others-- is the basic experience of the authority of God. But from the human side, the experience of this "ground of certitude" is the primary evidence which is authoritative for recognizing the authority of God. Strachan considers God the ultimate authority in religion ". . . apprehended personally in our own experience,"²² but he also states immediately that "effective religion must be 'my' religion; . . ."²³ It must be personal experience. This does not mean that man has the original initiative; rather, God has the original initiative, as Strachan points out,²⁴ but man has opportunity and the responsibility for positive response. Strachan also asserts that ". . . the seeds of authority and certitude are planted already in the individual experience itself, and that in such soil alone a religious authority which is really authoritative can grow."²⁵ This should not be taken to mean that God's authority literally grows, but that the

²¹Ibid., p. 20.

²²Strachan, p. 20.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 21.

²⁵Ibid., p. 16.

recognition of God's authority grows in a growing Christian. The certification of the reality of God's authority is in the experience of the individual. It could not be otherwise, for without conscious experience, man would not be human; and without the experience of the claim of God upon us, God's authority could only function negatively.

The Necessity of Individual Choice

The necessity of personal religious experience brings with it the necessity of individual choice. No group becomes religious en masse. Every group is composed of individuals, and the decision of a group is really decisions of individuals in the group. Although some one or few individuals in a group may exercise considerable influence for good or ill on what the decisions will be, nevertheless the individual still has the responsibility for what decisions he makes or accepts and for the consequent actions to which the decisions lead. As Dr. Otwell comments, ". . . one of the fundamental rules of life is that we pay for our choices whether we have made them ourselves or allowed others to make them for us."²⁶ In discussing how man may seek God, Dr. Otwell refers to various barriers which in some degree involve personal choice and then states: "The choice to grow, as well as the painful, constant struggle needed to achieve the objective, can be supplied only by the individual

²⁶Otwell, pp. 173-74.

himself."²⁷ God calls, but the individual must decide to follow. His own choice is necessary if he is to "change for the better." Concerning this possible "second birth" the individual has a choice--he can reject the call of God as he has experienced it, or he can decide to accept and seek the transformation this experience of the call of God offers. But he must pay the price of the effort of the choice and the loss as well as the gain. Dr. Otwell also expresses his belief ". . . that the skeptic must ultimately resolve his own basic doubts himself."²⁸ The only really positive religious choice is the one made by the individual when he could have decided something else. Blanche Carrier also calls attention to this need for individual choice in religious matters, and refers to salvation as ". . . a solitary work entailing personal will."²⁹ Approaching the question primarily from the concern for social integration of the individual, Biddle states the following in his Integration of Religion and Psychiatry:

Social integration is not possible without first restoring the integrity of the individual in society, moving as a unit toward his ultimate goal. Each individual can best further social integration by appointing himself as a "committee of one" to investigate and review his personal relationship with the Supreme Being. . . . The only person over whom anyone exercises any real and permanent power is himself.³⁰

²⁷Ibid., p. 227.

²⁸Ibid., p. 7.

²⁹Carrier, p. 170.

³⁰Biddle, pp. 160-61.

In this discussion the authority of experience has been stated and the necessity of individual choice on the basis of experience asserted. The importance of individual choice will be discussed further in considering the goals of Christian education.³¹ But how can a person know his experiences are to be trusted and how can he trust his own individual choice? Before these questions are discussed it is desirable to consider the part the human mind and thought play in evaluating the data of life.

The Role of the Thinking Person

One of the great mysteries of life is the distinctive nature of a human being. The brain may be spoken of as the physical tissue composed of living cells. Without this brain, there is no self-consciousness in any human sense. The brain seems to be the physical organ through which a self-conscious individuality exists and yet the brain is not the individual or the person. The center of personality is still a mystery whether it is called mind, reason, soul, or spirit. Therefore, for this immediate discussion, the term "thinking person" is used to serve as an expression for the working relationship of the various essential parts of a human being--brain, mind, reason, and soul. The location of the being which uses the brain as an organ of memory and thought still lies beyond present knowledge from controlled research. Yet the common human experiences of memory,

³¹Below, pp. 264-72.

conscience, and introspection presuppose some organizing center. Somewhere there is an organizing center which uses the physical as its vehicle. This might be called the Spiritual Person, as Dr. White has done,³² but this still does not give a fully satisfactory answer to the question of the essential nature of a human being. But somehow, the human being remembers, reflects on his memories, and tries to understand what his experiences mean.

Because human beings remember, data accumulates and reflective thinking can occur. Experiences are connected in the experiencing person and relationships are observed. It is observed that a child is born in due time after sexual intercourse of a man and a woman and therefore it is concluded that there is a cause-effect relationship. A human being drops a walnut at a certain spot and later realizes a tree has grown on that particular spot. Another is planted in another place and another tree grows. Yes, it is then clear that walnut trees grow from walnuts. It is not known why the walnut has the power to grow into a tree under certain circumstances, but it is clear that without the walnut sprouting and growing there is no walnut tree. Furthermore, it is observed that human beings can control where walnut trees grow by planting walnuts where walnut trees are wanted. Man cannot cause the walnut tree to exist at first, but given the walnut tree with its fruit, he can be instrumental in causing

³²Hugh Vernon White, "Outline of a Doctrine of the Person of Christ," p. 1. (Mimeographed.)

walnut trees to grow in designated places. Man observes that he can in some measure control effects by varying the causes which are allowed to bear upon a thing or a situation. Thus it has been discovered that inbreeding in corn causes weaknesses to appear which had not been dominant. Then the varieties of corn which prove to have dominant strengths are cross-bred and hybrid corn has been developed. Human beings did not make the original corn plant, but by observation and experimentation they have learned how to cause it to produce more abundantly. This analogy could be developed further and include the work of Luther Burbank and the developing of new varieties of plants and fruits like the navel orange.

But man has not always succeeded, at least initially, in determining the true cause and effect relationships. Thus Jacob is reported to have attempted to control the color of lambs that were to be born by placing peeled sticks in front of the sheep when they were breeding.³³ Man has since learned that this is not the true cause and effect relationship. But he has learned by selective breeding to control within limits the color and quality of animals and plants.

Human beings have also learned that they are subject to cause and effect relationships. When the first man to eat sour grapes and experience his teeth feeling as though they were set on edge saw other grapes which looked the same, he probably surmised grapes from the second vine would taste the

³³Gen. 30:37-44.

same as those from the first vine. Also, through experience and reflection, human beings have learned there are causes of health and causes of illness. It is clear that a deficiency of vitamin B causes beriberi. The scientific method is essentially a method for discovering cause and effect relationships in order to secure desired effects by helping provide the proper cause. The experience of cause and effect relationships is so demonstrable in so many experiences of life that it is only natural to assume that every effect has a cause, even though it may be difficult or as yet beyond the reach of present knowledge to ascertain exact causes of some happenings. In fact, the experience of cause and effect relationships is so overwhelming that man cannot conceive of an uncaused event. Rufus Jones even asserts that "no mind of our type can possibly admit that there could be an event that had no cause."³⁴ It is because of this experience of cause and effect relationships that man evaluates his experiences in the light of his best knowledge and understanding of cause and effect relationships. Thus, to be accepted as valid, an interpretation or claim about life and God needs to submit to the bar of reason and judgment. A person may be sure he felt a pain but he may not know why. For the experience of pain to be understood, the person must know what caused it and what it means. A person's religious growth is also a process of discovering the cause and effect relationships of life, and

³⁴Jones, p. 73.

his life in particular. But here the problem is more complicated than in the strictly physical realm.

The problem of how a person can know for sure he has interpreted his experiences correctly constantly faces people as they experience happenings for which the causes are not easily observable. Thus it is easily understandable there will be varying interpretations of the same event as different people interpret it on the basis of their particular experiences and knowledge. The old story of the blind men and the elephant is still relevant. It must be recognized that although there is a reality and authority coming from uninterpreted experience, yet mature authority comes from consistent interpretations of experience. It must also be recognized that there are varying experiences and varying interpretations of the same event and its causes and effects. Sabatier comments that "Christians may deceive themselves, and they often do deceive themselves, when they reason from their inward experiences to the causes that produced them, or the doctrinal conclusions that flow from them."³⁵ Wolfgang Schweitzer notes the difficulties which arise from varying experiences people have when reading the Bible and writes: "And if in our ecumenical discussions the 'appeal to Scripture' is ever to mean anything which brings us closer together, it is precisely our varying experiences which must be overcome."³⁶ The problem is also complicated by

³⁵Sabatier, p. 242.

³⁶Wolfgang Schweitzer, "Conciliant and Conciliar Ecumenicity," Review of Christ as Authority, by C. Bergendoff,

the existence of individual differences of temperament, interest, and experience which predispose a person to approach a problem in a particular way or interpret an event differently from others. A person who has experienced a chill because of sickness might interpret an experience of shivering as a sign of sickness, whereas a person who has experienced shivering from cold but not a chill in sickness would not likely interpret shivering as a sign of sickness. Strachan also observes that prejudice and animosity and the desire for undisturbed peace may interfere with a person's valid interpretations of his experiences. He comments that "an element of personal character always interweaves itself with the certainties of religious experience."³⁷ Thus, although experience is the functioning authority for certifying what is true, private judgment cannot be infallible in complex matters. But this variation in experiences and in the interpretation of the cause and meaning of experiences does not mean that every experience and every interpretation of experience is so subjective that man is lost in subjectivity wherever he cannot demonstrably verify his interpretation. Here the thinking person with his requirement that experience be understood, and causes and effects traced if possible, plays a

The Ecumenical Review (Spring, 1949), pp. 345-48. (At the time of writing, Wolfgang Schweitzer was Secretary in the Study Department of the World Council of Churches.)

³⁷Strachan, p. 44.

significant role.

The charge that religious experience and its interpretation which we call religious knowledge are subjective and therefore undependable raises two issues: first, how can we distinguish between reliable and unreliable religious experiences or experiences of any kind; and second, how can we distinguish between reliable and unreliable interpretations of what the experience, religious or otherwise, means. It should be noted that every experience known to humans is subjective--no experience exists in human beings outside an individual who in some sense colors what he experiences. Yet the experience is real. No person in his right mind can deny the fact of his experiences. He may interpret some as misleading and unreliable, but the experiences are nevertheless there. As Strachan points out, "the first thing to be said about religious experience is that it is a psychological fact. Its 'subjectivity' does not belie its factual nature."³⁸ Feeling as though some strange force has invaded one must be accepted as a feeling regardless of the validity of the interpretation of what caused the feeling or what the feeling meant.

Dr. Otwell has an excellent discussion of how new experience can be evaluated; his discussion is especially relevant to the question of subjectivity. He lists five elements as necessary for the evaluation of new experience;

³⁸Strachan, p. 34.

they are:

(1) the presence of the experience itself in consciousness; (2) stability in the experience itself even when circumstances change; (3) change created by, or accompanying, the experience; (4) recurrence either in our own consciousness or appearance in other centers of consciousness; and (5) coherence with other experience and with previously accepted experience.³⁹

The first element is self-evident--without it there would be no need for evaluation. However, the other four elements are really requests for evidence upon which to evaluate experience.

Let it first be recognized that the request for evidence is legitimate whenever any reflection on an experience begins, or when any question as to the interpretation of an experience or the cause and effect of an experience is raised. The request for evidence is legitimate because by it the sincere person seeks to protect himself from being misled and from misplacing his faith. The request for evidence is also the request of a person to protect himself from the subjectivity of himself or the subjectivity of someone else. But the request for evidence is essentially the request for proof. Therefore, let us consider the problem of proof and then relate the questions of evidence and subjectivity to the whole question of how the human person knows.

The Problem of Proof

The request for proof is the assertion of the thinking person that he does not want to be fooled, i.e., misled. If all experiences made a totally coherent experience, there would

³⁹Otwell, pp. 29-30.

be no problem. If all the suggested answers to the why-questions did not present us with incoherence, or at least the appearance of incoherence, there would be no request for proof. But the thinking person is confronted by many experiences which challenge him to think and help cause him to ask for proof. A ticket agent is too busy to handle all his calls at once and promises to telephone an inquirer as soon as he can. But the ticket agent does not telephone soon and the inquirer telephones the ticket agent again. He claims he is still busy and promises again to telephone the inquirer as soon as he can. This time the inquirer is a little hesitant to wait but finally agrees to wait for the ticket agent to return the call. But the ticket agent does not call soon and finally the inquirer telephones the ticket agent again. This time the ticket agent talks to the inquirer and supplies the needed information. But in consternation the inquirer learns that the train he should have traveled on has just left. The next time the inquirer calls the ticket agent and the agent claims he is too busy to get the requested information then but will call back as soon as he can, the inquirer does not feel sure the ticket agent will, and would like some evidence, some proof. Or consider the practice of allowing those who are arrested to post bail and then go about their business till the day of the court hearing or trial. No doubt an arrested person would often be glad to promise to appear at a hearing but would be tempted not to appear if he could do so without serious loss. Therefore, bail is required to insure that

the accused person will actually appear. The posting of bail is not an absolute proof that the accused will appear, but if experience shows that accused people do not usually forfeit a substantial sum of money posted as bail, the posting of bail serves as substantial proof the accused will appear as promised. The request for evidence which serves as proof is a legitimate request in the light of experience, and in the area of human relations, absolute proof is often extremely difficult or practically impossible. If the posting of bail in a particular case were deemed inadequate proof that the accused person would actually appear for a hearing or trial, he might be put in prison. But occasionally someone escapes from prison. Then a special guard or guards might be posted, but occasionally a prisoner gets control over a guard and uses him as a hostage to enable him to escape. It is difficult in some areas of life to find absolute proof.

Since in the area of human relations it is so difficult to establish absolute proof, proof may be defined as evidence sufficient to convince. This is the practical policy upon which we base our decisions in matters concerning other persons. This is the policy upon which a jury in a court of law is instructed to make its decision; a jury is instructed to be sure beyond the shadow of a reasonable doubt, recognizing that proof in the absolute sense may be impossible in some cases. This does not mean that in simple affairs and experiences evidence is never absolute. Seeing one man hit

another is absolute evidence for the observer that the one man did hit the other; it is proof. Observing in an experiment that adding two cubic centimeters of hydrogen to one cubic centimeter of oxygen always produces water is evidence that water is composed of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen; in fact, since there is no contrary evidence, the evidence may be considered as providing absolute proof.

Hydrogen may be broken down into protons and neutrons, but two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen put together still make water. It is true that below thirty-two degrees Fahrenheit the water becomes ice, but such is the result of another factor which was not in the original experiments. But two parts pure hydrogen added to one part pure oxygen at a temperature of seventy degrees Fahrenheit always results in the formation of water. The proof is absolute--under the given circumstances with the given actions, water always is formed.

But when the problem of observation becomes more complicated, the problem of absolute proof becomes more difficult. Thus Dr. Otwell writes that when a person ". . . seeks to grasp a simple reality, the result seems objective; when it attempts to cope with an intricate reality, the result seems subjective--a 'value judgment.'"⁴⁰ He concludes that "subjectivity . . . is really complexity, not unreality."⁴¹ Whenever we face complexity we must be careful not to attempt

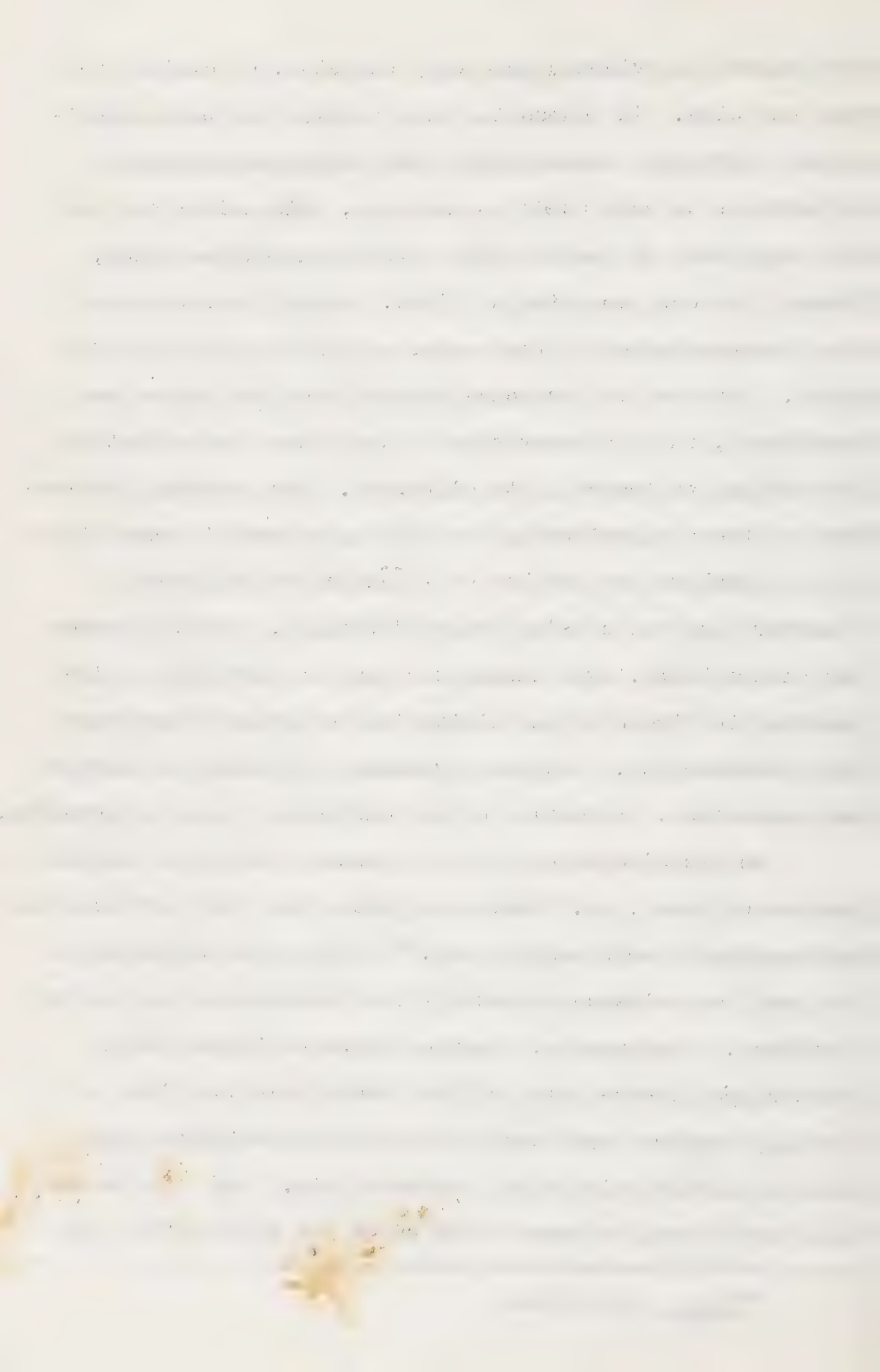
⁴⁰Otwell, p. 27.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 28.

conclusions on evidence from only one side, or claims from only one side. In counseling with couples who were experiencing difficulty understanding and making satisfactory adjustments to each other in marriage, this writer has had the experience of hearing each person make claims which, viewed from only one side at first, seemed plausible as a true interpretation of the causes and effects of the difficulty. Yet when the evidence claimed from both sides was considered, the interpretation of the causes and effects of the difficulty looked quite different. The personal involvement of those experiencing the difficulty made it more difficult to analyze the problem of a couple and help them discover what was causing their difficulty. Yet the causes are always there, even though they may be difficult or impossible to find with the limitations of present knowledge and understanding. But when evidence sufficient to convince was recognized, prevention of the difficulty might be possible.

In his discussion of the problem of skeptics and the problem of proof, Dr. Otwell also notes that both intellectual and emotional needs must be met.⁴² This calls attention to the need for evidence to satisfy the emotions as well as the intellect. For example, a person whose religious faith depends upon the validity of the theory that the Bible is verbally inspired may react with fear when evidence which would challenge this belief confronts him. Then the person needs additional evidence which helps him at least see the

⁴²Ibid., pp. 13-20.



claim that religious faith does not need to depend on the verbal inspiration of the Bible. When the cornerstone of a person's integration of life is considered by a person to be threatened, it is understandable he should have feelings of insecurity and fear. These needs must also be met with evidence appropriate to them.

Sources of Evidence

It is asserted in this study that experience is the data with which the thinking person works and that without experience there is no knowledge. But someone might object that the experience of one individual is entirely too limited and subjective to trust in making the major decisions of life. Therefore, it might be reasoned, the institution or the Church should make the decisions. It must be admitted that no individual could develop to any significant degree if he had to depend only on his first-hand experiences in every area of life. In the material realm, it is almost self-evident that we are dependent on the experiences of others for many things. Few of us would have automobiles if we had to start from the first and learn first-hand everything that needs to be known to build an automobile. This is true of most of the appliances and machinery that are so common in our generation. It is also true that progress in the social sciences would be almost nil if every person had to start at the beginning and learn from first-hand

experience the lessons necessary for social well-being. The same would be true of religious understanding and growth.

But human beings are not limited to knowing and understanding only what they have experienced first-hand. There is also the possibility of the experience of the experiences of others. By this it is meant that thinking persons can experience the interpretations others have put upon their experiences. In fact, as our ancestors have left records and literature they have left us accounts of their experiences, their interpretations of them, and their conclusions about cause and effect relationships. The Bible is essentially this kind of statement of experiences, interpretations, and cause and effect relationships. To understand that falling can result in a broken leg, it is not necessary for each person to have actually fallen and broken a leg. Rather, it is enough to have experienced the pull of gravity and to have experienced the verifiable knowledge of others who have fallen and broken their legs. Also, it is not necessary to learn first-hand what is the ethical thing to do in each situation. Rather, it is even better to have learned the principle which serves as the criterion for deciding what is best to do in each situation as it is encountered. It is true that before we can appropriate the lessons learned by others we must have experienced problems similar in kind to those others describe and

interpret. As a boy this writer had the experience of being told that if he hit the cork of a jug full of water and there was no airspace at the top, the jug would break. There had been no experience in the boy's life to help him understand that air is compressible but water is not, and so he learned first-hand in one lesson that, given the conditions and the adequate blow on the cork, the jug would break. But the principle later was understood that not only water but liquids do not compress appreciably but transmit the force of a blow to the other side of them. Had the principle been explained to the boy, he might have understood the lesson without the first-hand experience of breaking his jug.

This principle, that thinking persons can learn from knowledge of the experiences of others, is also valid in relation to moral problems. We may observe the lives of other people which provide us with abundant evidence. We may observe actions and results and form hypotheses or conclusions interpreting the cause and effect relationships and choose our course of action on this basis. Or we may have learned that certain people are reliable witnesses and therefore we give their claims about experiences and their interpretations of them a high degree of credibility even before we have tested them. It is true that if in our subsequent experience what a supposedly creditable witness has told us is shown to be faulty, then we will be less

likely to act upon the evidence of that person's claims in the future. Thus, if a child is taught to be honest, he may learn to be honest without experiencing the bad effects of dishonesty beyond the discipline of his parents. If later experience causes him to doubt the advisability of being honest, then he may revise his opinion on the matter, and perhaps learn in a more first-hand way the necessity of honesty, or perhaps never learn it. In like manner, a person may be taught that it is desirable to have a forgiving rather than a censorious attitude toward other people. This experience of the teaching of older people may be evidence enough to convince the person to grow to be forgiving and experience the confirming evidence from experience that it is desirable to be forgiving. And if a person experiences situations where forgiveness has prevented bad results, he has more evidence which supports the validity of what he had been taught.

In summary it can be said that all of our experiences, including the experience of the knowledge of events and interpretations of them as reported by others, are sources of evidence for our thinking as they become a part of our thinking and are appropriated by us. But how can we know which, if any, interpretations of the meaning of the evidence, and in some cases what the event was, is true? Somehow the data, the claimed evidence, must be evaluated. The experience of contradictory claims requires this.

The Evaluation of Evidence

Were there no experience of contradiction or incongruity there would be no need to evaluate the validity of evidence and interpretations of evidence. But as the preceding chapters in this study have illustrated, the claims concerning what is authoritative interpretation invariably result in requiring the thinking person to decide what claim he will recognize as authoritative. In a previous section of this chapter the tests to which new evidence must be submitted were listed as outlined by Dr. Otwell.⁴³ These tests are stability, "change created by, or accompanying, the experience," recurrence, and coherence.⁴⁴ If the experience is not stable, that is, does not continue to be the same in varying circumstances, then it is not dependable and therefore nor useful. For example, if a person professes to be in love with a certain person, but when out of that person's presence acts toward a second, third, or fourth, party as though the first person were not the loved one, the experience interpreted as love for the first person is shown to be something besides love for the first person, for the attitude of

⁴³ Above, pp. 225-26.

⁴⁴ There are other excellent treatments of the whole problem of evidence and proof, e.g., Bertocci, pp. 12-13; L. Harold DeWolf, A Theology of the Living Church (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1953), pp. 23-32; D. Elton Trueblood, The Knowledge of God (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1939); and Georgia Harkness, Foundations of Christian Knowledge, pp. 28-50.

love toward the first person is not maintained. The experience then may need to be evaluated as just plain sexual attraction or being "in love with love."

Second, experience can be evaluated from the standpoint of whether it makes a difference. If it does not make a difference, the claimed experience may be misinterpreted. If a person claims to have been converted but there is no real change in him, the interpretation of the experience would be in serious question, and it would be necessary to seek further to ascertain what the experience really was. The experience can be evaluated by what it causes.

Third, experience needs to be evaluated in the light of whether it recurs under the same circumstances, and whether others have the same experience. For instance, if a person experienced hearing a voice but others present under the same outward conditions did not hear a voice, although they had full opportunity to have done so had there been one, the experience of the person hearing a voice might need to be interpreted as the result of something besides the result of vibrations of air against the eardrums. This would not say that the one hearing the voice did not experience hearing it--it would mean that the experience was of a different kind than the hearing of audible sounds. Upon further investigation the person hearing the voice might learn of other persons who had heard similar voices in a similar way and be guided by it

in evaluating his experience.

Fourth, and most important for evaluating the claims and interpretations of experience by others, is the test of coherence with already accepted knowledge and experience or with other claimed experience. This test is of extreme importance, both in the testing of new experience and evaluating already accepted interpretations. The experience of miracle is a good example. Essentially, a miracle is an event, the direct cause or causes of which we do not know. Thus, miracle is really an interpretation of the cause or causes of an event. It may be that God is considered the cause of a miracle, but this is hardly an interpretation of the direct cause of the event referred to as a miracle. The term miracle is also used in the sense of a very rare coincidence, but that is not meant here. The real problem posed for thinking persons today by the interpretation of some event as a miracle is that this interpretation does not agree with our other experience. Our experience of cause and effect relationships is so overwhelming that the interpretation of some event as a miracle thus strikes the critically thoughtful person as not coherent, or else as either naive oversimplification or an evasion of the difficult task of discovering the cause or refusal to admit we just do not know.

An all too common occurrence today and yet a good example of the problem of interpretation of seemingly miraculous events is the variation in severity of injury to those

involved in serious traffic accidents. We are all familiar with stories of those who have lived through a very serious accident with only a few bruises or minor injuries. Such escapes are often referred to as miraculous, and a person who has thus escaped serious injury or death in such an accident might honestly think and feel that God had intervened with direct action to save him. But upon close investigation it could be demonstrated to the satisfaction of most critically thoughtful people that a combination of circumstances had "caused" a certain person to escape serious injury while another person in the same car was killed or seriously injured. Factors to be considered would be obstructions a person might be thrown against, the direction of the impact, the way a person landed, and his physical condition. For example, if a door opened because the body of the car was sprung by the impact, thus letting a person fall out through the door rather than being thrown against it, and if the person landed on the grass rather than the curb because the speed at which he was traveling gave him enough momentum to land on the softer surface, and if there were no other hard obstructions for him to hit, he would not be seriously injured and yet it would not be a miracle; the causes of the person's escape from serious injury would be known and they would be coherent with other experience.

Because of the overwhelming experience of cause and effect relationships, the claim of miracle strikes the critically thoughtful person as open to serious question

because it would deny coherence on the level he experiences it. The assertion that an event is literally a miracle in this era meets the contradiction inherent in our experience of events which formerly were interpreted as miracles now being explained by additional knowledge of cause and effect relationships. Thus, faith healing is coming to be recognized by critically thoughtful persons as the result of meeting the psychological conditions which cause the removal or overriding of the causes of the incapacity. There is still much we do not know about faith healing and the influence of the attitude or will of the thinking person, but enough is known to make the term miracle inappropriate to faith healing in any literal sense. This does not mean that miracle is explained away, but rather that the causes of many events formerly interpreted as miracles are better known. But if all truth is coherent, is there a valid difference between religious and scientific truth and method?

The Relation of Religious and Scientific Truth and Method

Statements of religious truth are arrived at experientially. Thouless attests to this when he writes that ". . . the whole intellectual activity of making heresies and making creeds can be regarded as a typical expression of a deep-seated psychological tendency to try to impose order on our experiences by making theories about them."⁴⁵ Knox

⁴⁵Thouless, p. 33.

comments that ". . . all early attempts to describe what is usually called the 'work' of Christ are . . . attempts to set forth the empirical realities of a new communal life."⁴⁶ Thus, Jesus is called ". . . 'Savior,' because the event has proved to be in fact the saving event and the community the saving community."⁴⁷ Knox also states that "all the earliest names of Jesus are functional names; they are ascriptions to him, as source or mediator, of the values that have been empirically received in consequence of the event and in the actual life of the community."⁴⁸ Experiences are the primary data with which all religious statements of truth originate. Regardless of whether the experiences include claimed revelation, reflection, and intuition, the statements of truth build upon experience and are attempted interpretations of experience, and, therefore, of life. This does not say that the thinking person can by his reason or his intellect finally prove the existence of God or that he can prove life has purpose. But the thinking person can use experience to attempt to understand cause and effect relationships and to suggest the implications which are coherent with his interpretation of experience and the cause and effect relationships.

One writer asserts that "the truths of religion . . . have to be believed at first on insufficient evidence; on

⁴⁶Knox, p. 73.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

evidence, that is, which would be insufficient for any rational proof, but which becomes sufficient when acted out in living."⁴⁹ But this is really a misstatement of the process. Rather, the claims of religion must appear to have sufficient validity to cause a person to decide it is worth while to attempt to live by them. This does not mean that a person must actually be completely convinced before he will try to live by a new principle. A person may try to get help through prayer primarily because he may be in real danger or conflict and feel so inadequate that he is willing to try prayer, not because he is really convinced prayer works but because he does not see any satisfactory way out of his difficulty. It is true that in moral and religious life we human beings must make decisions and take action even when we do not have complete proof our decisions or actions are right. And so we may try to do the best we can in the light of what we have learned from experience. It is not necessary that the truths of religion be believed firmly before they are acted upon, rather the claims for the truths of religion are considered worth evaluating. Then the results of action in accordance with what are claimed to be religious truths guide us in determining whether the claims are true. Willey would really agree with this, even though his statement just quoted sounds otherwise. He states a few pages further on that

⁴⁹ Basil Willey, "Faith and Reason," The Student World, XL (Fourth Quarter, 1947), 318.

" . . . the one thing I feel most sure of is that faith must be grounded upon something which, though not rationally demonstrable, is yet experimentally true, true to our experiences and needs as moral beings."⁵⁰ This is using experience as evidence and clearly means that his earlier use of the concept of belief must be qualified. But Willey continues with the thought that, beginning with the conviction that " . . . faith must be grounded upon something . . . experimentally true . . . we may find that many of the specific Christian doctrines acquire a compelling power; without the basic experience, it will be unsafe to persuade ourselves that our faith is firmly grounded."⁵¹ Thus, what is really being stated is the existence of a hypothesis which is considered to be likely enough to be true to justify trying it. This is in kind the same as scientific method; only the subject matter and the degree of complexity are different, and these are not so different when psychology and atomic physics are concerned.

In science, beyond the simpler problems, the element of intuitive hypotheses plays an important part. Basic to the great work of Einstein and his development of the theory of relativity was his faith that the universe is orderly.⁵²

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 321.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Alfred G. Fisk, The Search for Life's Meaning (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1949), p. 44, citing Albert Einstein, Cosmic Religion, Covici, 1931, pp. 53, 83, 98; and Einstein's essay in Cotton, Has Science Discovered God?, Crowell, 1931.

This cannot be demonstrably proved in the same sense that it can be proved that heat causes air to expand, but Einstein was sure enough of it to base his further work upon it. No one has yet seen a proton or a neutron, and yet the concepts are useful and must be substantially true. Clinchy comments that "the perceptions of the atomic age were made by faith, faith in that which was unseen but apparently true."⁵³ In other words, the hypotheses in both science and religion are the projection of what is considered likely to be true in the light of known knowledge and evidence. And it is reasonable to act upon an hypothesis till other evidence is known which would either confirm, deny, or refine the hypothesis. The problem may be more difficult and more complex in the field of religion than some science, but this does not make the process of knowing different.

To suggest that the truths of religion and science are incompatible does violence to another basic element in experience--the experience that all life is interrelated. It is true that science has disproved some claims of some people about religion and cause and effect relationships. It has been proved that rabies is caused by another form of life, and not by an evil spirit. It is now understood that an earthquake is the result of natural processes rather than the act of an angry God. The natural causes of lightening and thunder are now known and are not considered to be the

⁵³Clinchy, p. 96.

direct action of God. These developments represent gain for both religion and science; they help us refine our knowledge of God and of the laws of nature. Dr. Otwell refers to the attempt of some ". . . to compartmentalize life, holding religious truth to be of a different kind than scientific truth, each valid in its own sphere and applicable there."⁵⁴ He points out that the seeming conflict between religious and scientific truth ". . . often is caused more by fallacies involved in the statement of one or both of the incompatible 'truths' . . . than by the presence of irrationality in the specific areas of knowledge validated."⁵⁵ Therefore, he comments that ". . . we must be as critical of the leap of faith involved in scientific truth transmuted into scientism as we are of the transformation of the experience of God into a theology."⁵⁶ The way toward a solution is the application of the tests of claimed experience and knowledge to validate the interpretations. The very reason the believers in scientism and fundamentalism fight so hard is that the believers in both views think there is a relation; in fact, they believe the relation is so close that if one position is true, then it automatically means the other interpretation is not true. The relationship of scientific and religious truth is inescapable. Any interpretation of life which includes all

⁵⁴Otwell, p. 63.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁶Ibid.

of life is necessarily related to every phase of life and truth. Thus, the religious interpretation includes all other interpretations within it, for it is a more inclusive knowing.⁵⁷ But claims of knowledge in any field are really interpretations of evidence and are subject to the same tests to ascertain their validity. As Dr. Otwell states, ". . . all knowledge is governed by the same fundamental rules when the accuracy of its portrayal of reality external to the knowing subject is in question."⁵⁸ We need not say that "all knowledge is equally subjective . . ." as Dr. Otwell does,⁵⁹ but we should recognize that all knowledge is subjective and relative to some degree. And because life is ultimately an interrelated whole, religious and scientific truth are part of ultimate truth, and related parts of the whole; each is true in so far as it is ultimately true. The ultimate loyalty of any thinking person is to the highest truth that he knows.

The Ultimate Loyalty

Man's ultimate loyalty is to Truth, including God. Confronted with experiences which must be interpreted to be understood, man attempts to state what he thinks is true. The authority of a statement of truth for a man is the

⁵⁷The writer is indebted to Dr. Rood for class discussions and insight in this area.

⁵⁸Otwell, p. 24.

⁵⁹Ibid.

authority which his acceptance of it gives it over him. This is determined by his experiences, and his own experience of trying to interpret them. Thus experiences constitute the authoritative data for a person, but he gives his loyalty to what he considers to be the nearest true interpretation of that data. Therefore, a man's ultimate loyalty is to truth, and to what he considers to be the best statement of truth.

In this regard it is extremely interesting to note the thinking of Frank E. Gaebeline, who is Headmaster of Stoney Brook School on Long Island, and who is a member of the Commission on Education of the National Association of Evangelicals. Gaebeline states that "any adequate basis for Christian education must . . . include God's revelation in creation as well as in His written Word."⁶⁰ But then he writes that ". . . our human understanding of the book of nature must not be made the norm for acceptance of the other book, the Bible."⁶¹ Nevertheless, he cautions against ". . . the rash assurance with which some Christians who know next to nothing about the spacious realm of science dogmatize regarding the book of creation."⁶² He admits that we "see through a glass darkly" and calls attention to the fact that Ptolemaic astronomy was once considered to be

⁶⁰Frank E. Gaebeline, The Pattern of God's Truth: Problems of Integration in Christian Education (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 30.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., p. 31.

Scriptural truth. He thinks that the final admission of the truth of Copernican astronomy illuminated rather than overthrew the Bible. Then he comments: ". . . it is becoming increasingly plain, for example, that man is far older than the traditional 6,000 years."⁶³ To substantiate his statement he refers to the carbon clock and states the evidence for its validity. He then speaks of "the essential truth" of the creation account in Genesis and states that this new evidence will not change "the essential truth" but will rather broaden and deepen it. Apparently for Gaebeline "the essential truth" is composed of the "facts upon which Christianity rests . . .: the existence of the living God, the Maker of heaven and earth; man's creation in the image of God, an image ruined through the fall beyond human power to repair . . ."⁶⁴ Thus, Gaebeline has accepted evidence from nature to reform his view of the account of creation given in Genesis; he has valued the evidence from nature higher than his earlier understanding of the Genesis account. But he had said a few pages earlier, as quoted here, that our human understanding of nature must not be the norm for acceptance of the Bible. He might say that interpretation and acceptance are different things, but this would only be an evasion--the Bible has to be interpreted, and everyone who reads and studies it does interpret it in some degree.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 34.

This thinking from Gaebeline is especially interesting because it illustrates the problem the fundamentalist faces when he sees new truth and it does not cohere with what he had earlier held as truth. The steps may be devious to enable the person to accept the new truth without losing the values of the old, but the loyalty to truth is such that, when new truth is seen, it has to be included in a person's thinking, and somehow incorporated into his whole understanding of truth. For a person to refuse to do this is to be dishonest with himself and to lose his own integrity. It is unfortunate that too often those who argue with such people do not understand the emotional problem involved and try to force the immediate acceptance of the new truth. The fundamentalist or literalist who has admitted the new truth to himself needs time to reflect upon it, assimilate it, and make the adjustments in his previous thought that enable the new truth to be constructive rather than destructive. To put pressure on a person in such a situation only threatens him with loss of face and very likely will cause him to become defensive.

The question might be raised whether man's ultimate loyalty might be to his own desires and interests rather than to truth. This would be a very important criticism if it could be substantiated. But there are two sides to the question. First, from the Christian viewpoint, the ultimate truth is God, and He has the ultimate authority over His

creatures. From the other side, the immediate authority is man's organization and interpretation of his experiences, including his experience of the wisdom of the human race. This interpretation of experience appears to the human person as truth. He may be wrong in his interpretation, but his interpretation is still what he holds to be truth. Therefore, a man's loyalty is to truth as he understands it. Therefore, the highest loyalty a man can have on earth is loyalty to what he considers to be the truth. A man may be a hedonist, but if he honestly believes that the hedonist interpretation of life is the truth, then it very naturally has his loyalty. It is true that a man may make errors in judgment as to what is truth; he may even be so subjective he misinterprets experience, but his misinterpretation is still his understanding of truth, even though others might say his understanding is so wrong it is a misunderstanding. A man's desires and interests may condition a man's willingness to look at new evidence because he is afraid that if he looks, he might feel the need to change his interpretation of what is truth. This very apprehension, which sometimes leads to rationalization, is evidence of man's feeling of loyalty to truth. If he did not fear an honest look might bring to light new truth which might be in some degree contradictory to what he already embraced as truth, there would be no apprehension.

But the very question of the possibility of

misinterpretation of experience, resulting in limited or relative statements of truth, leads to the necessity of free inquiry. In fact, in view of the varying interpretations of the Bible, Jesus, God, the Holy Spirit, and Christianity, it is necessary that there be free inquiry for the study and evaluation of previous statements of truth. Previous statements of truth and the basis upon which they were made must be open to study for each person and for each generation. The loyalty to ultimate truth requires this because of experience. The Ptolemaic astronomy was found to be untrue after free inquiry study, even though Copernicus was imprisoned before the new truth he had discovered was accepted. The theory that the world was created and animal and human life placed upon it in six days has been proved wrong in the light of biological and geological studies. Such a list could be extended to great lengths; the fact that the experience of the human race shows that some attempted statements of truth in the past have been proved wrong, or seriously lacking, necessitates freedom of inquiry in all fields, including religion.

Loyalty to truth and, therefore, to free inquiry has its foundation within the individual. Bertocci suggests that ". . . perhaps the most fundamental of all moral actions, the act at the base of all others, is the willingness to think as accurately and as circumspectly as possible."⁶⁵ He refers

⁶⁵Bertocci, p. 24.

to "the fundamental virtue" as being, in the words of C. I. Lewis, "'willing to give as much weight to what the opposition may put in evidence as to what we advance ourselves.'"⁶⁶ Bertocci also states that "to be true to the facts is even more crucial to the development of a human being than to be true to his neighbor," and then he turns it around and asks ". . . how can one be true to his neighbor, if he is not true to the facts?"⁶⁷ Bertocci also asserts that

. . . there is no basis for trust in any assertion, and there is no basis for praising or blaming any action, except as any assertion or any action proceed from the use of man's freedom to think and to commit himself to what he approves. Deny freedom and you deny a universal ground for trusting the very truth or the falsity of the statement by which you assert it.⁶⁸

Paul Lehman asserts that "the right of free inquiry is an unabridged right . . ." with the one exception of ". . . the limitation imposed upon the response to truth by the responsibility inherent in the response itself."⁶⁹ Therefore, he concludes that ". . . neither state, nor church,

⁶⁶C. I. Lewis, The Ground and Nature of Right (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 33, quoted by Bertocci, p. 25.

⁶⁷Bertocci, p. 26.

⁶⁸Bertocci, p. 26. (Bertocci makes these statements in relation to free will, but they are very closely related and equally valid in asserting the necessity of free inquiry. Free inquiry would also be meaningless without some degree of free will.)

⁶⁹Paul Lehman, "Academic Freedom in the United States," The Student World, XLVII (Second Quarter, 1954), 164.

nor public opinion, nor organized vested interest can determine the conditions or the limits within which the right of free inquiry is to be exercised."⁷⁰ Lehman recognizes the fallibility and corruption of the human reason, but thinks the remedy is not from the outside, but ". . . is an inner purification through a heightened sensitivity to the concourse between the human mind and the truth which it seeks and apprehends."⁷¹ He questions "whether this heightened sensitivity can be achieved without a religious commitment . . ." but thinks that ". . . even without such a commitment, there is no alternative to the self-limitation involved in academic freedom except the destruction of that freedom altogether."⁷² With this last we might want to take issue, for in the case of convinced communists, there may need to be some basic ground rules of honesty and fairness which will insure that the various interpretations of truth are heard honestly and fairly. But the inner loyalty to truth must never be forgotten and is the foundation upon which we can build.

This inner loyalty to truth is the highest loyalty, and allows us to choose lesser loyalties under it and subject to it. On April 30th and May 1st, 1954, there was a conference at Union Theological Seminary in New York City on the

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

theme "The Relation Between Religion and Freedom of the Mind." Invited guests were from the faculties of colleges, universities, and seminaries in and near New York. Included in those present were: Perry Miller, Robert Calhoun, Buell Gallagher, George Shuster, Robert MacIver, M. Searles Bates, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Wilhelm Pauck. In reporting the thinking of the people at this meeting, Frank W. Herriott wrote: "Our ultimate solution is loyalty to ultimate truth in which we have freedom to deal with lesser loyalties which tend to be idolatrous."⁷³ This implies that there should be freedom to investigate all attempted statements of truth, because ultimate truth is always beyond us. In a similar way, Harold Durfee expresses the view that

If we are convinced that the true transcends all finite manifestations of itself, we realize that no formulation can be identified with the true itself. Thus one is liberated from the demand for the false security of expediency and is free to search for the truth.⁷⁴

In fact, because the truth is not fully known, we should have the opportunity to evaluate all formulations of what is claimed to be truth, and to make our own formulations in the light of our best knowledge and understanding based upon experience, including study and research.

⁷³Frank W. Herriott, "Religion and the Freedom of the Mind," Religious Education, XLIX (Sept.-Oct., 1954), 355.

⁷⁴Harold A. Durfee, "Freedom, Truth, and Commitment in the Christian College," Theology Today, XI (July, 1954), 246.

Further, loyalty to truth and free inquiry includes confidence in the power of truth to win the acceptance and allegiance of the thinking person. The validity of all forms of democratic and representative government whether in church or state depend upon this. This does not mean that the majority will always be right, but it does assume that, given the opportunity to get the facts and seek the truth, the majority will be right more often than wrong. This does not deny the rights of minorities and the history of minority positions becoming majority positions, but there is also a history of minority positions which never became majority positions because they did not win the acceptance of the majority of individuals. For example, the Townsendites have represented a minority position, and have had freedom of speech and assembly, but their position has not become a majority position because people have not become convinced the Townsendites are right. This very confidence in truth and in its power to win the acceptance and allegiance of the thinking person is well illustrated in the statement by eighty Christian ministers in Atlanta, Georgia, in which they support their belief in the necessity of freedom of speech in dealing with school desegregation by saying :

"'Truth is mighty and will prevail.'"⁷⁵ Robert Ingersoll reveals this same confidence in truth when he refers to his views of the Bible, especially the Pentateuch, and the quoting

⁷⁵Time, Nov. 11, 1957, p. 99.

and misquoting of his speeches on the subject by clergymen who replied to him. He then states his belief ". . . that arguments cannot be answered by personal abuse; that there is no logic in slander, and that falsehood, in the long run, defeats itself."⁷⁶ Bernard Shaw expresses the same faith when he writes in the Preface to St. Joan the following:

A Church which has no place for free-thinkers; nay, which does not inculcate and encourage free-thinking with a complete belief that thought, when really free, must by its own law take the path to the Church's bosom, not only has no future in modern culture, but obviously has no faith in the valid science of its own tenets.⁷⁷

On the other side, lack of loyalty to truth and to free inquiry and the consequent lack of confidence in the power of truth to win the acceptance and allegiance of the thinking person has implications which are far-reaching. Strachan raises the question ". . . whether the intrinsic value of religious experience does not suffer serious loss, when its autonomy and freedom are curtailed by submission to an external authority whose own credentials are regarded as beyond criticism."⁷⁸ He then points out the implications as follows:

Such a submission assumes that God is unwilling to entrust the knowledge of Himself, which He seeks to impart to men, directly to the individual experience; matters of religion are regarded as too important for knowledge, and are made objects of a certitude which demands material guarantees for belief and is imposed,

⁷⁶Ingersoll, Part II, p. vi.

⁷⁷Bernard Shaw, St. Joan, quoted by Strachan, p. 23.

⁷⁸Strachan, pp. 14-15.

rather than imposes itself, on the human spirit. Such a position inevitably reflects the character of God as conceived in the minds of those who hold it, and the kind of communion which He permits.⁷⁹

It is one thing to teach what one believes. It is another thing to try to impose one's beliefs on another, rather than allowing the other person freedom to make his own decision, too. Unfortunately, succeeding generations may be reared so that none of them have had the freedom to think, and each succeeding generation may impose its beliefs on the following generation by childhood conditioning and psychological pressure and fear. The lack of faith in truth to win the acceptance and allegiance of thinking persons reveals a lack of faith in man and in God's truth, and a lack of faith in God for giving man freedom.

Faith and confidence in the power of truth to win the acceptance and allegiance of thinking persons carries with it the responsibility to allow and encourage investigation of positions accepted as true and positions considered to be false. This is for our own good, as well as the good of others. None of us in our right mind wants to believe in and live by something that is not true and, therefore, brings bad results in the long run. We may often be short-sighted, but we are not normally so irrational. Thus, we have a duty, as Thouless suggests,⁸⁰ to evaluate doctrines

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Thouless, p. 62.

we are taught in order that we may understand them and not give our assent to falsehood. We should also recognize some responsibility to prevent the propagation of falsehood by not assenting to it ourselves, although we would do this by fair reasoning and discussion in the light of the most trustworthy evidence and experience we can find. Thouless also carries the battle to the opposition when he remarks that it is rather rare ". . . to find an intellectually alert religious believer who has not at some time considered the possibility that his system of religious beliefs may be a delusion," but that "it is . . . not uncommon to find intelligent unbelievers who are unable to consider the possibility that the religious system of ideas may be true."⁸¹ He asserts that the religious unbeliever has the responsibility at least to consider ". . . the possibility that the religious interpretation of the universe may be the true one."⁸² Certainly the responsibility to allow and use free inquiry to evaluate fairly and honestly all interpretations of life and the universe rests as firmly on the unbeliever as on the believer.

The faith in the power of truth to win the acceptance and allegiance of thinking persons also includes the faith that ultimately the effect of truth is constructive for the ultimate goal of life. Albert Outler implies this when he

⁸¹Ibid., p. 119.

⁸²Ibid.

writes as follows concerning the need and project of an ecumenical history:

. . . the doctrinal issues which divide us (and the "non-theological factors," too!) can and will be faced in an ecumenical spirit in which there is no question of coercion or surrender, but an ardent prayer to the Spirit of Truth that He lead us into truth, despite our obduracy. Conceived and executed in such a spirit, this project of an ecumenical history would prove of wide and great usefulness--in theological study and training, in the reorientation of our parochial Christian interests, and in the area of ecclesiology as well.⁸³

This clearly expresses the confidence that the truth coming out of free-inquiry study into Church history will have a constructive effect upon the relations of the churches and upon our attitudes toward each other. It should. Paul Lehman expresses a similar confidence in the good effects which truth brings when he writes that "truth is inherently constructive, not destructive, creative not stultifying, liberating not enslaving, critical not parochial."⁸⁴

However, this should not blind us to appearances of danger which may come to some people. The more important a particular belief is to a person's total interpretation of life, the more likely a person is to react with fear when that particular belief is challenged or called in question.

For example, if a man believes that the truth of what Jesus taught depends upon his being divine, and that if he was not of virgin birth he was not divine, then any suggestion

⁸³Outler, The Ecumenical Review, V (Oct., 1952), 63.

⁸⁴Lehman, The Student World, XLVII (Second Quarter, 1954), 164.

that Jesus was not of virgin birth would threaten that man's religion. He might feel insecure and become defensive and seek every argument possible to prove to himself that Jesus was of virgin birth. However, if the person comes to believe that the question of the divinity of Jesus does not depend upon his physical ancestry because divinity is not a physical thing, he might come to feel that this position was superior to his former position and belief in the matter. Thus, he would think the truth had had a constructive effect, although at first it had appeared the result would be otherwise. This faith in the ultimate good effects of truth should also caution us to prevent the limitation of free inquiry by suppressing or ignoring evidence and claims which we or others fear may contradict what is already held to be true. Free inquiry requires honesty and fairness from all, and awareness of one's own wishes and fears and dislikes, so that truth may be freely sought. The loyalty to truth includes loyalty to free inquiry.

The loyalty to truth and to free inquiry is also essential to the functioning of experience as authoritative for what the thinking person considers truth to be. Without this loyalty to truth and free inquiry, the thinking person would have no adequate criterion to evaluate his experiences and the experiences and interpretations of others. With loyalty to truth and free inquiry the thinking person can,

to a considerable degree and within limits set by his nature and circumstances, exercise the captaincy of his soul which God has given him and for which he is responsible. Then, as Thouless points out, the alternative ". . . of either a coercive intellectual proof of the truth of religion or the adoption of faith on wholly irrational grounds does not . . . exhaust the possibilities."⁸⁵ Rather, the rational grounds on which religious belief is accepted may be regarded

. . . as an empirical judgment based on a weighing of evidence similar to that made by a jury when deciding on a verdict. The acceptance of a belief in God and in a spiritual world may be considered to be neither an insight into a necessity of thought nor an emotional decision without rational foundation but an act of faith whose rational foundation is a judgment based on a consideration of all the available evidence.⁸⁶

It is the combination of loyalty to truth and free inquiry which makes this kind of choice possible. It is this loyalty which prevents radical subjectivism on the one hand and radical objectivism and authoritarianism on the other hand.

The authority of total experience is the most dependable guide to truth and individual growth and is based upon the right of each individual to freedom of inquiry and conclusion. This right to the freedom of inquiry and conclusion certainly includes as its corollary the responsible

⁸⁵Thouless, p. 115.

⁸⁶Ibid.

use of this freedom, as was indicated in the earlier discussion of the dangers and limits of freedom.⁸⁷ But the risks of freedom should not blind us to the dangers of authoritarianism. Our loyalty to truth should lead us to endure necessary risks involved in allowing every individual his right to the freedom of inquiry and conclusion. For the authority of experience to function adequately, the thinking person must have this freedom of inquiry and conclusion; he must be free to evaluate experience, and to decide what he thinks is true, or most nearly true, or more likely to be true on the basis of available evidence. The wise and prudent in Christian education requires the understanding of this and the utilization of it in teaching.

From this consideration of the authority of truth and experience, it appears that although a person's highest loyalty is to what he considers to be the truth about life and the universe, yet truth can be apprehended by a person only through experience, even if this is the experience of direct confrontation or encounter with God, or the experience of the testimony and interpretation of others. To understand experience and to guard against subjectivism, it is necessary that the individual, the thinking person, evaluate his experiences by comparing them with the experiences and thinking of others both present and past. By evaluating experiences and interpreting their meaning carefully, cause and effect

⁸⁷Above, pp. 107-118.

relationships are discovered, although the discovery of these relationships is much more difficult in many of the complex experiences of life. By testing interpretations of experience it may be possible to improve the understanding of the universe and of life. Therefore, loyalty to truth is perceived to require freedom of inquiry and conclusion to make possible the evaluative study of the interpretations of life and the formulations of truth stated by others both past and present. Of course, with this freedom comes the responsibility to make positive use of it or lose it. But the risks of freedom of inquiry and conclusion should not blind us to the dangers in the lack of freedom which is authoritarianism. We have seen that freedom of thought is necessary for the maximum development of the individual--without the opportunity and necessity of choice, the individual's religious growth is stunted. Let us bear all of this in mind as we consider the opportunity and responsibility of teaching with faith and freedom.

PART III

THE PROBLEMS FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

POSED BY THE ISSUE OF AUTHORITY

AND FREEDOM IN THE PROTESTANT

CHURCHES IN AMERICA

CHAPTER XII

THE PROBLEM OF GOALS

In the foregoing chapters evaluating the validity of the various claimed authorities in religion, it became clear that every claim for authority is subject to the will of the person over whom the authority is claimed. Even the authority of God was seen to be limited to the negative action of judgment if the individual person used his freedom to try to reject or deny the authority of God. It also became clear that every interpretation of God's nature and will, and every claim for the authority of any person or institution professing to speak for God, must be recognized as relative and subject to the evaluation of the person over whom authority is claimed. It was finally reasoned that the thinking person as an individual is his own authority for determining what authority he will accept, and that he makes the decision on the basis of his experience, including the experiences and interpretations of others which he can test and evaluate and which have become a part of his total experience. Loyalty to truth was seen to include loyalty to free inquiry because of the relative nature of all formulations of truth. But since truth can be known only in experience, all claims about truth are subject to the

interpretation and evaluation of the individual in the light of his total experience, including his knowledge and understanding of the experiences of others both living and dead. Therefore, we must consider the goals of Christian education in the light of the freedom of the individual to be his own authority with responsibility under God.

Any Christian would include in a statement of goals of Christian education a combination of superior and subordinate goals. There is a natural hierarchy of goals within Christian education, but there are even questions about the nature of the highest goal.

The goals of Christian education could be stated in the words of Jesus when he was asked what was the first commandment. He answered as follows:

The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.¹

Thus the goal of Christian education is to help persons to accept and love the one God, and to love their neighbors as themselves. Because Visser 't Hooft was so often asked to state the purpose of the Study Department of the World Council of Churches, he regretfully attempted to state its purpose in one sentence by saying that ". . . the purpose of the Study Department is to help the Churches to know the will of God for this generation and to do it--a hard task

¹Mk. 12:28-31.

but a noble one."² This could also serve as a concise definition of the goals of Christian education. With these statements of the goals of Christian education there would be no substantial disagreement, but when the subordinate goals and the methods for reaching them are stated, there will be diversity.

A personal relationship to Jesus Christ would be suggested by many as a primary goal of Christian education. But concerning the nature of the mission and work of Christ, there is serious disagreement. The more orthodox believe that Jesus somehow atones for our sins and thereby makes it possible for God to accept us sinners into fellowship as righteous. The more liberal Christians think that no one can atone for our sins; rather, they can only be forgiven by God who will also give us the power to overcome our sins if we will open our lives to Him and avail ourselves of His assistance. Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, certainly filled a unique role in the revelation of God's love and will, but this does not require that the Christian religion be ". . . the religion in which Jesus Himself is the center of worship and which was elaborated by St. Paul," as is implied by Murray.³ Murray suggests as the other alternative ". . . the religion that Jesus Himself had and is supposed to exemplify,"⁴ but there is another

²W. A. Visser 't Hooft, "Editorial," The Ecumenical Review, II (Winter, 1950), 121.

³Murray, p. 74.

⁴Ibid.

alternative which this writer would suggest. The religion we want to teach is the religion Jesus taught and lived. It has been reasoned previously in this study that Jesus did not seek to attach men primarily to himself but directed them to the God to Whom he prayed and to Whom he taught them to pray.⁵ Jesus taught the love and worship of the one God, the acceptance of God's love and forgiveness, and the amendment of life expressed in personal purity and action and in loving service of God and neighbor.

The religion Jesus taught and lived will include the religion ". . . Jesus himself had and is supposed to exemplify . . ." and will be the criterion for evaluating ". . . the religion in which Jesus himself is the center of worship and which was elaborated by St. Paul." This includes discipleship to Christ but not necessarily the worship of him as God. This includes acknowledgement of Christ as Lord, but not necessarily as God. This also includes acceptance of Christ as Savior, but not necessarily in any magical or substitutionary sense. Rather, this view recognizes Christ as Savior in the sense that he, by his life and teachings, leads us to God and His saving love, forgiveness, and fellowship--into newness of life and service. Thus it would hardly be best to say that ". . . the center of Christian education is Christ," as Murray does.⁶ The center of Christian education

⁵Above, pp. 72-77, 132-35.

⁶Ibid., p. 215.

is God and His will. In this Christian education, Christ plays the major role as the anointed one who most fully reveals God to us if we will but listen and follow. It is not Christ, but the fulness of the revelation of God and His will, love, and forgiveness, along with His requirements, that are revealed through Christ--that is the real Gospel.

In the attempt to teach what we believe, we automatically set up other subordinate goals for Christian education. We may set up as one of the goals the understanding and use of the Bible by the average lay person. Cunliffe-Jones thinks that the task of the ". . . enabling of Christian believers . . . who are not technically Biblical scholars to read their Bible for themselves is "one of the most urgent tasks for the renewal of the Christian Church . . ." ⁷ Visser 't Hooft also calls attention to this need in a recent article in The Student World. ⁸ But we immediately face the problem of whether we tell the lay person what to think about the Bible and what the correct interpretations are, or whether we try to help him become acquainted with the Bible, and with thinking about the Bible and how it should be studied and interpreted, and leave him free to decide what he thinks the Bible teaches

⁷Cunliffe-Jones, The Authority . . . , pp. 9-10.

⁸W. A. Visser 't Hooft, "The Bible and the Church," One of a panel of three addresses, followed by discussion, given at the Bible Study Conference, held at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, Sept. 2-12, 1955, The Student World, XLIX (First Quarter, 1956), 63.

in its different parts. This is a very involved and important practical problem for those who believe in the freedom of the individual to read and interpret the Bible for himself. This problem of how to teach the lay person to use and understand the Bible in freedom will be discussed in detail later.⁹

For the nonauthoritarian Christian, the development of the individual person into a mature Christian person who accepts the reign and will of God, and in love tries to live and serve his fellowmen, is the goal of Christian education. This includes the individual's right to think for himself and to choose his allegiance without pressure but in good faith and responsible freedom. This is a minimum statement which leaves the details of theology to the conscientious decision of the individual Christian. The essential goal is the acceptance and service of God and our fellowmen in love. But soon to be raised would be the question of whether the mature Christian person is one who accepts the teachings of a particular church without question, or whether the mature Christian person is the one who through study and thought decides for himself what he thinks the Christian gospel is and gives his allegiance to it with all his heart and soul and mind and strength. Surely all Christians would agree that Christian maturity includes a high quality of faith and life, but there would be radical disagreements over different statements of what a mature Christian faith is. For

⁹See below, pp. 320-25, 344-66.

example, some think that a mature Christian faith must include belief in apostolic succession and in the doctrine of the Trinity as necessary beliefs of a Christian. Others may think these are matters which should be left to the individual conscience and are not necessary for a mature Christian faith. Some might assert it is not obedience that God wants but the loving response of cooperative endeavor in the spirit of Christ. There is a serious question whether any approach to the Christian Gospel which stresses obedience can but lead to a legalistic attitude toward Christian faith and observances. Bertocci thinks that "one of the most important shifts to be taken in a maturing personality is that from an authoritarian (must) conscience to my 'own' conscience, that is, the move from what was uncritically accepted to critical approval or disapproval."¹⁰

This writer definitely agrees with this statement by Bertocci and thinks that Christian maturity involves the basic attitude and qualities exemplified in Jesus Christ. This maturity includes the inner acceptance of the spirit and love of God with the result that one is free from legalism and can use his mind and heart in applying the Christian spirit and principles to all the problems of life. Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson in the report of their study of theological education express their conviction that the need ". . . for personal maturation, an exploration of

¹⁰Bertocci, p. 55.

complex ideas, and a personal encounter with ultimate problems which cannot be reduced to the memorization of details or to a series of neatly planned lessons," is more important in theological education than in other fields.¹¹ This statement is suggestive of the fact that the attainment of factual information about the Bible, Church history, and doctrine, even if one believes it and tries to live by it, leaves one immature unless one understands the spirit and message that should be the major concern in all of these.

In their report of this same study of theological education in America, Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson state their conclusion as follows:

The net result of these observations and critiques may be stated simply: The greatest defect in theological education today is that it is too much an affair of piecemeal transmission of knowledge and skills, and that, in consequence, it offers too little challenge to the student to develop his own resources and to become an independent, lifelong inquirer, growing constantly while he is engaged in the work of the ministry.¹²

Canon Theodore Wedel, Warden of the College of Preachers in Washington, D.C., expresses his distress over the failure of ministers to learn to be students who continue their own study and research after they leave seminary. He feels most of the clergy he deals with are victims of the "content illusion" and that "independent reading and 'dialogue with an author' is scarcely known."¹³ These are strong words coming from people

¹¹Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson, p. 135.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Theodore Wedel, in a letter quoted by Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson, p. 138.

in a position to know the problem much better than most. Clearly they consider Christian maturity much more than just information. The problem of encouraging maturity in lay people is made much more difficult by the immaturity of the clergy. Perfection is of course hardly to be expected, but a high level of maturity in understanding and critical study and thinking is surely required, along with a Christian spirit of love and compassion. But to make this possible, there must be the experience of Christian freedom and the challenge and opportunity to choose to mature.

The goal of all Christian education should be that of helping people hear and accept the reality and the call of God and His love, forgiveness, and will. This includes helping people grow into greater Christian maturity, into the fullness of the image of God. Helping people study and understand the Bible and Christian history and doctrine are only means to help people reach this higher goal. The ultimate goal of Christian education is to help people grow into and live in the fullest possible image of God; all other goals are subordinate and should be judged in the light of their effectiveness or ineffectiveness in furthering the achievement of the supreme goal.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PROBLEM OF DIVERSITY IN BELIEF

Diversity of Christian belief has been feared from very early in the history of the Church. From the first major disagreement over whether the Jewish laws for ritual cleanliness were binding for Christians, through the Montanist, Donatist, and Arian controversies, to the present fundamentalist, liberal, neo-orthodox, conservative controversies, and the recent discussions of the nature of the Church and Christian unity, there has been diversity of Christian thought and practice. If the nonauthoritarian Christian churches are to be dynamic and vital Christian fellowships witnessing to the Gospel and calling men to vital Christian faith and living, they must solve the problem of diversity of belief within a local congregation and within a denomination as a whole. The problem is complicated by the tendency for people who think alike to like to associate with each other and to feel uncomfortable when confronted with differences of opinion on issues that are considered important. Further, the authoritarian attitudes toward the Bible and particular Christian doctrines have been such as to discourage the acceptance in close Christian fellowship of those with contradictory interpretations of Christianity. But how can

the problem be solved in freedom?

We are learning by long and bitter experience that no human being has the right to discriminate against another human being in civil, educational, occupational, and housing rights on the basis of race. We Christians must also learn that no person who is honestly and sincerely trying to follow the teachings of Christ should be refused Christian fellowship. This does not mean that everyone should accept everyone else's opinions, which of course would be impossible, nor does it mean that people should be allowed to molest others with insistence on their own views. Fortunately, in much of the world, the days of religious persecution in the form of legal imprisonment and possible execution are over. But the attitudes which led to prison sentences and death penalties for unorthodox religious convictions may still be present. Thouless searches for the attitude or belief which led to the justification of persecution for heresy and concludes that it is the belief that ". . . correctness of belief . . . is a necessary condition for salvation . . ."¹ In our religious freedom in America, we Protestants have accepted the right of any and all religious groups to exist as long as they obey the civil law and do not molest their fellowmen. However, many Protestants have not given up the view that correctness of belief is necessary to salvation. According to the

¹Thouless, pp. 42-44.

teachings of Jesus,² not doctrine but the spirit and the fact of love and service in which a person lives is the basis of salvation. This basic criterion was apparently ignored in the heresy proceedings against Pastor Crist referred to earlier.³ This writer knows a man, let us call him John, who was forced to resign from a cooperatively supported teaching position because of his liberal religious views and who then went into pastoral work in a city not far distant. When Dick, a new pastor of the same denomination which had forced the resignation of John, came to work in the city where John had moved to serve as a pastor, John kindly made his home available for Dick until Dick could find a suitable home. In discussing the problem with the writer some time later, Dick commented that it seemed that some of those with less orthodox beliefs were more Christian in spirit than those who professed belief in more orthodox doctrines.⁴ We must learn the lesson that doctrinal orthodoxy is no assurance of salvation or Christian living. Until we learn this and begin to live in that spirit of love and compassion which Christ taught and

²See above, pp. 73-75.

³Above, pp. 7-8.

⁴The principals involved in this incident are known personally by the writer but are not identified here for personal reasons. Of course, the names used are fictitious. It is not intended to discuss the merits and demerits of the two sides here, but only to illustrate the point that orthodox profession of doctrinal belief is still often considered to be the basis of salvation rather than a man's spirit and life.

exemplified, we shall not have solved the problem of learning to live in Christian love and fellowship amidst diversity of detail in doctrinal belief.

In discussing the problem of diversity of belief within the Church, Thouless, an Anglican, distinguishes three "traditionally recognized categories of belief:" "obligatory beliefs," "permitted beliefs," and "indifferent beliefs."⁵ He reasons that "obligatory beliefs" should be "reduced to a minimum" and include ". . . only those fundamental beliefs which are essential to Christian faith."⁶ He thinks that a fourth category of belief, "orthodox non-essential," should be added, thus indicating the Church's teachings but allowing freedom of thought and opinion wherever possible and encouraging tolerance.⁷ What Thouless is suggesting is essentially what has been done in the nonauthoritarian Protestant churches. There could be considerable disagreement over what doctrines are considered to be essential for Christian faith, but Councils of Churches in the United States have often solved the problem by using some such statement as belief in Jesus Christ as divine Lord and Savior, leaving the precise definitions and interpretations of the terms to the

⁵Thouless, pp. 92-93. (Other Anglicans may agree with him. In the preface, pp. 7-8, he states that the Rev. R. C. Walls and Sir Will Spens each read part of the book before it was published.)

⁶Ibid., p. 94.

⁷Ibid., pp. 103 and 94.

consciences of the leaders and interested people of the member churches. If something similar could be done in the more conservative churches, it would be a big step forward in practical Christian freedom. It would also solve some other pressing problems which result from growth or changes in theological opinions and consequent tensions or shifts in membership.

On the basis of studies of college and university students and their changing religious beliefs, Allport states that ". . . only about 60 per cent of the students who feel the need for a religious orientation find the system in which they were reared satisfactory to their needs."⁸ Further, of the 200 students in the sample who were reared in "the more orthodox Protestant churches," one-quarter had turned irreligious and only 42 per cent ". . . were content to stay within the tradition in which they were reared."⁹ On the basis of this study, which seems to be at least reasonably typical of college students, Allport concludes that only around 25 per cent of today's college students believe ". . . in the historic pattern of orthodox Christian doctrine . . ."¹⁰

⁸Allport, p. 41. (The study upon which this and other statistics are based included 414 Harvard University undergraduates, of whom over two-thirds were veterans of World War II, and 86 Radcliffe undergraduates, all in the fall of 1946. He raises the question of how representative the sample was but writes in a note that "recent unpublished replications of our work suggest that our findings do in fact hold surprisingly well for several diverse college populations." Ibid., p. 36.)

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 42.

If Christian salvation depends upon orthodox doctrinal belief, there is little hope for most college students! The changes in religious attitudes and beliefs revealed by the study of Harvard and Radcliffe undergraduates, and other similar studies, indicates the need for the kind of statement of Christian faith which leaves people free to change their opinions on Christian doctrines while at the same time they continue their loyalty to God and Christ. The refusal of this freedom for the individual to revise his doctrinal opinions and to endeavor honestly to know and do God's will in love, and the tenacious holding and asserting that it is necessary to believe in particular doctrines beyond a minimum statement of belief in God and in Jesus as the Christ creates serious problems for Christian growth in interested persons, and handicaps the present and future work of the more orthodox churches. P. T. Forsyth gives an excellent characterization of the attitude coming from ". . . the belief that our certainty of faith concerns a deposit of truths, committed to us, and detachable from our personality and its history."¹¹ Forsyth notes that this view has often resulted in Christian truth being viewed as a possession, "a piece of spiritual estate," which we can enjoy, but with only ". . . the duty of preserving it as our spiritual inheritance against others."¹² Forsyth then comments

¹¹Forsyth, p. 34.

¹²*Ibid.*

that people with such views ". . . have a touchy and turbulent creed rather than a militant faith."¹³ Blanche Carrier writes an excellent description of the results in local churches of such attitudes as Forsyth describes. She states:

. . . what usually happens in the uncreative situations which congregations create for themselves is that the traditional takes over an authoritarian role and re-creates for the less sure experimenters and thinkers the parent-child relationship. In this case the submissive accept the old pattern, giving up the creative search for better ways, the more vigorous disappear from the scene, so that a dead "harmony" reigns leaving all three--the triumphant, the defeated and departed--still separated, with resentments unmitigated. Yet the real tragedy of the situation is that the growth of the congregation is stymied, for it clings to the old inadequate patterns.¹⁴

If a college or university student were faced with the attitude described by Forsyth or the tragic "harmony" described by Carrier, it is only understandable he might be sickened by religion as he saw it, or at least shift to a church where there was a free and vital growing fellowship. The more orthodox churches must either indoctrinate and separate their people more completely, or else grow with their more thoughtful and informed ministers and members. The way forward in freedom is to go deeper to the religion Jesus taught and lived, respecting honest differences of opinion and learning to live in Christian fellowship even with those with whom we disagree theologically.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Carrier, p. 66.

Learning to Live With Other's Beliefs

Normally we can live with our own beliefs without serious conflict even when our beliefs are not completely consistent, but the beliefs of others cause us uneasiness and irritation when they differ from ours in things that are considered important. And so it is with different religious beliefs which imply that our beliefs are untrue if the beliefs of others are true. The problem becomes especially irritating when others with different beliefs try to convince us theirs are right. Then it is easy for misunderstanding to develop and fellowship to be lost. Confronted with honest differences of opinion, what can we do in Christian freedom and fellowship?

First, let it be recognized that no one is infallible and no one completely fallible. Therefore, there is often, but not always, some truth on both sides of a difference of opinion. Second, let it also be recognized that a person who holds his Christian beliefs strongly naturally wants to propagate those beliefs. This is especially true in Christianity where the responsibility for preaching the Gospel to others is enjoined in one of the four gospels¹⁵ and implied in the other three. Third, in spite of strong religious convictions, there is a time to stop insisting on one's own view and either wait for a more opportune time or try to understand better the viewpoints of others. This could be

¹⁵Matt. 28:19-20.

called simply good manners. Murray thinks that good manners ". . . are far more relevant to the fruits of the spirit than is any mere orthodoxy of doctrine."¹⁶ He deplores how some otherwise well-mannered people will abuse their opponents in an argument and notes that "to be able to distinguish between a man and his opinions is an art almost entirely lost over the greater part of the earth's surface today."¹⁷ The manners motivated by Christian love are considerate and fair, and not abusive.

There must be respect for the freedom of others, even when others disagree with us. Bertocci suggests that ". . . if we know that others are using their freedom, often in accordance with the best they know, if we know that their stand for some objective opposing our own comes from the core of their being, we are rationally forced to respect their conscientiousness even when we cannot respect their conclusion."¹⁸ He then observes that much of mature living is faced with this problem, and yet the only way to have it otherwise would be to be without freedom. We shall always be faced with differing opinions and controversial issues. Therefore, let us learn to live with them and learn to handle them with goodwill and fairness in Christian love. Murray suggests that ". . . part of religious education is

¹⁶Murray, p. 140.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁸Bertocci, p. 50.

to train people to live together in a society of differences."¹⁹ This is necessary in the world and also within the Church and the churches. We must learn to transcend our differences, as Murray suggests St. Paul meant,²⁰ rather than expect all the differences to be eliminated.

To transcend our differences, we must learn to understand and respect the people with whom we differ. One of the best techniques for helping us do this is to learn to know each other better. So often arguments are the result of people having closed minds and refusing to try to understand an opinion with which they disagree. In arguments between such people, while one person is talking the other waits only for another chance to express himself rather than listening carefully to understand what the other person thinks and why he thinks it. One of the best ways for people to learn to know each other is to sit down together and honestly try to understand what each person thinks and why. Then there is a real opportunity for mutual understanding and respect to develop, even if there is not full agreement. But even this type of meeting often stops at just the point where the endeavor to understand each other could lead to fuller agreement and understanding. Often disagreements are over points of fact or of interpretation, but each person insists that his statement of the fact or his interpretation

¹⁹Murray, p. 134.

²⁰Ibid.

of it is correct, and then the matter is left there. How much better it would be for the parties to a dispute to seek further information together. In questions about the Bible, church history, and social problems, it is often comparatively easy to go back to the sources or review the problem together seeking honestly to know the truth in the matter. With such an approach, the emphasis can be on trying honestly to take a fresh look at the evidence, with the result that both parties to a dispute are likely to gain new information and revise their views, coming closer to agreement in the process.

But what can we do when we cannot honestly come to an agreement on an issue and yet action needs to be taken? It is well known that dictatorships have an initial advantage in contests with democracies because dictatorships can take decisive action quicker. Close agreement or centralized authority always makes quick action easier. With almost every issue we face as Christians and as churches, there comes a time for definitive action, and we can wait no longer for full agreement. Then it is that the majority must be given the freedom to take decisive action which involves even the minority, and which needs to be supported by the minority. For example, a local church may have discussed for some time whether to accept Negroes into its membership but there have been sharp differences of opinion and no decision has been made.

Then one day a Negro presents himself in the usual way to seek baptism and membership in this church. Now the time has come when the decision cannot be delayed any longer. The only way forward in freedom is for those responsible for the decision to vote and follow the will of the majority. The majority may decide unwisely, but the minority must respect the decision, even though they may try to have it reconsidered. There is real meaning in the British term "the loyal opposition." When there has been a fair vote with full knowledge of the facts, the matter should be closed until there is new evidence or a change of mind by some members of the majority. For those of the minority not to be loyal in the meantime signifies their practical withdrawal from the fellowship; they have broken the fellowship, not the majority, unless the majority disrespects the rights of those of the minority to continue in their opinion. If more use were made of parliamentary procedure in the work and decisions of our churches, we should be helped to see that it is essentially a Christian way of working effectively together in spite of our differences, and, in the process, a way of transcending our differences. Of course, parliamentary procedure must be undergirded by the Christian virtues of honesty and goodwill and respect for the rights of others, but the technique is sound and Christian.

But what should be done with people who call themselves Christian yet try to infiltrate another denomination

or religious group to turn it to their way of thinking and acting? The writer knows a pastor who faced this problem. Students who were related to the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship began to attend the college student group in his church and to insist on their point of view. The Inter-Varsity students continued coming for a period of several months and tried to turn the group to their way of thinking. The Inter-Varsity students apparently did not come to learn and worship as an integral part of the group but to dominate the group. Finally, the pastor of the church told the Inter-Varsity students that if they wanted to come as individuals to his student group because they felt their church home was there, they were welcome, but if they were coming to try to dominate the group and make it fundamentalist, they were not welcome. When authoritarian groups misuse the freedom of nonauthoritarian groups, can the nonauthoritarian churches be true to their principles and yet restrict participation to those sympathetic to their point of view? The principles of democratic action referred to just above surely indicates part of the answer. Also, there is a difference between a fair hearing for the various points of view and prolonged and disruptive argument; there comes a time for decision. It surely cannot be reasonably argued, even in the guise of Christian freedom, that a religious group or church cannot put restrictions on those who come into the group or church with the intent of trying to redirect the thinking of the

group. For any person or group to try to do so is a violation of Christian brotherhood and a breach of Christian fellowship. Under such circumstances a religious group or church surely has the right in good Christian conscience to prevent the disruption of its teaching and meetings by those who would come in to dominate and redirect it. The misuse of freedom brings the loss of freedom.

In view of the presence of diversity of belief we face the necessity of learning to live and work with other people who hold views different from ours. It appears that the belief that salvation depends upon correctness of doctrine is a major error which misrepresents the Gospel. We need to study again the life and teachings of Jesus and see his emphasis upon the spirit of love and compassion expressed in action as the requirement for entrance into the Kingdom of God. We need to learn to respect honest differences of opinion and those who hold opinions different from ours. With freedom to differ, we can nevertheless live and work together democratically and transcend our differences. We can also protect our freedom by refusing to allow abuse of freedom by those who would destroy our freedom. The goal is not complete unanimity of doctrine but unity of spirit and action.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PROBLEM OF TEACHING

Should people be taught what to think, or be helped to learn to think? Should we indoctrinate our youth and applicants for church membership to believe as we do and not ask any doubting questions? Should we protect our youth and applicants for church membership from hearing or considering opposing points of view? Shall we provide "Christian" colleges and universities, and perhaps even elementary and secondary schools, to teach the one true religion? Shall we endeavor to have all seminary students for each denomination trained in seminaries of that denomination so they will be sure to get only the truth and remain loyal to that denomination? What is the task and role of the teacher; is it to lead the student to a preconceived conclusion? These and other questions confront us when we ask what the teaching work of the Church and the Christian is. It is not anticipated that fully satisfactory answers will be found to all these questions, but the attempt will be made to illuminate them by exploring them and the problems involved for those who believe in a nonauthoritarian view of religion and teaching.

The Question of Indoctrination

For those who believe that the whole truth, at least in seed and with no error, was given to the apostles and that their successors have been guided by the Holy Spirit so that no mistaken dogmas have ever been proclaimed, indoctrination is a natural approach. Given this view, the truth is to be taught and accepted and any questioning or refusal to accept it is lack of faith and rebellion against God. Those who believe that the truth has all been given in essence in the past and that formulations of this truth have been protected from error through the guidance of the Holy Spirit inevitably tend toward an authoritarian approach to teaching. It does not depend on whether the particular faith is Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, or authoritarian Protestantism, the view that the truth has been given once and for all, without error and completely, suggests that the primary task of the Christian teacher is to gain the acceptance of this truth by the learner. But since truth cannot be discussed without some formulation of it in words, the truth comes to be identified with some particular formulation of it--some creed which changes not. And if God and truth do not change, then the creed must not be revised to mean anything it did not at least mean by implication when first formulated.

But in view of the radical differences of opinion

regarding the interpretation and authority of the Bible and tradition, as demonstrated earlier in this study,¹ and in view of the fact that all statements of truth are relative, the free person should be nonauthoritarian in his teaching approach. The individual must be left free to evaluate the history and creeds of the past, to think for himself and to come to his own conclusions about what is the most nearly accurate statement of truth in the light of his total experience. But when this is said, there are other practical problems lurking in the road ahead. One of these practical problems is that we cannot refuse to teach.

All young human life faces the foreboding task of living in a world and a society which has laws and customs to which the child must learn to adjust. A child cannot live without accepting his world to a very large degree. His experience is so limited he must also be protected from serious physical harm till he has had enough experience to enable him to understand what to suspect will happen under given circumstances. And so the child must be told what to do at first. But the child also seeks to understand cause and effect relationships--he asks "why"? He wants to understand and he asks for help because his experience is so limited. And here, partly because the child's knowledge and understanding are so limited by his limited experience, the adult is tempted to be authoritarian and to answer the

¹Above, pp. 120-31, 174-81.

child with simple statements intended to end the questions. It is also easy at this point for the adult implicitly or explicitly to profess to know more than he does, only making it more difficult for the child and for the adult when the child learns the adult didn't know as much as he pretended he did. The writer's little six-year old girl asked one day, "Daddy, where was Jesus born?" The child simply wanted to know. In answer, it was stated that we don't know for sure in what city or town he was born but that some think he was born in Bethlehem and some think he was born in Nazareth. It was further explained that we know, however, that he lived in Palestine, although we are not absolutely sure exactly where he was born. The child was informed that we also do not know exactly what day Jesus was born, but that we can celebrate Jesus' birthday anyway. It was pointed out this is similar to our celebration of Mother's Day. Probably the child did not understand all that was said, but the question she had asked was answered to communicate the limitation of exact information on this point, and to interpret what the limitation meant. The question will surely be raised again in the future, but surely a good nonauthoritarian beginning has been made. If the child wants to question where Jesus was born, she will surely feel free to do so. This suggests that parents and the Church have a primary duty to share their information and thinking with children as soon as the child is ready for it and wants to know.

The first duty of parents and the Church is to teach their young the best they know as soon as the child can appreciate and use it. Of course, this is a continuous process, and must be adapted to the child's interest and readiness. This means that we should teach our children the best we know about God, the universe, life, and how to live. We cannot refuse to teach the child for even the refusal to teach on particular points teaches something else, such as we don't know, or don't know how, or it is not important. Therefore, the nonauthoritarian parents and churches must not refuse to teach the best that they think they know. But there is one very important additional task that is often left undone--we must teach our children why we think what we do, and also what different views are held by other people and why we do not think they are best. There is a great difference between teaching children why we think what we do or teaching them to believe what we think because we think it. There is enough tendency to do the latter without it being reinforced.

But when the child has reached adolescence, shall we keep him immature and teach him what to think, or shall he be allowed to express his doubts and with our blessing evaluate our claims? When our teachings and opinions are challenged, there is a greater tendency for them to be reasserted with greater force, and with less attention to the limits of our knowledge and to the possible validity of

other points of view. We face this problem especially in the local church where, except in the case of a few non-denominational churches, there is the tendency to teach a particular interpretation rather than a broader approach which makes possible intelligent choice by the learner. This problem is well stated by a Honolulu Study Group when its members state that "the universality of the gospel tends to become compartmentalized by the particularity of the local church life."² The Honolulu Study Group recognizes the need for Christian doctrine and the need for teaching it, but also notes that ". . . the broad essentials of Christian faith become subject to the particular approach of the particular church."³ The problem is complicated further by the elements of time and the desire of people for clear and concise statements of fact and truth. Is it not in place then to suggest that one of our duties as Christians is to caution against oversimplified attempted answers to complicated questions and issues, and to challenge people to spend the time necessary to gain the basis for intelligent decisions? Is it not also part of our duty to confront people with the necessity of thinking by leading them into

²World Council of Churches, "Local Church Unity and Its Ecumenical Implications," Orientation Paper prepared by the Honolulu Study Group for Section 5 of the North American Faith and Order Study Conference held at Oberlin, Ohio, Sept., 1957, p. 9. (Mimeographed.)

³Ibid., p. 10.

experiencing the difficulties of a problem or problems before suggesting possible answers, rather than giving the neat and concise answers they would like? Often we tend to be authoritarian, or allow an authoritarian result, because others make it so easy for us to do so.

The basis for an authoritarian result in teaching, and the removal of the basis for freedom of choice, is closely related to availability of information concerning other points of view. Therefore, dictatorships practice censorship, whether they be political or religious dictatorships. This writer has seen the effects of the Communist control of the press in Poland and how it affects persons who would make their own decisions if the information and evidence were available. But even normally intelligent people become limited in their views and unable to make the necessary decisions when they are denied the necessary factual information. So it is in matters of religious belief. We are often so concerned about church membership and denominational loyalty that we present only one side of the argument, of course the one favorable to our point of view. This is a very effective way of being authoritarian and limiting practical freedom. It might be argued that, after all, in our country a person could find out if he wanted to, and thereby overlook the practical difficulty of the average church-related person doing this unless his teachers in the church help him do it.

This problem of a narrow approach to religious education which results in a practical indoctrination is not limited to a local church; it is also painfully evident in the field of theological education and the training of ministers. Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson state that "the majority of theological schools offer no work in non-Christian religions," and that "for many years the accepted statement on pretheological training for example had nothing to say about work in this field."⁴ When asked to state the significance of the study of non-Christian religions in the preparation of Christian ministers, one professor ". . . who has made such studies an integral part of the theological program in his school . . ." replied in part that "to neglect study of other religions is a provincialism which our Christian faith itself in its claim for universal significance cannot tolerate."⁵ In their published report under the title The Advancement of Theological Education, these three men discuss ". . . the significance of a controlling doctrinal point of view whether it be 'traditional' or 'antitraditional' . . ."⁶ As a first principle, it is suggested that ". . . a theological school which provides only one theological viewpoint in its entire faculty is likely to be preventing the profoundest kind of intellectual inquiry and is not doing

⁴Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson, p. 100.

⁵Ibid., pp. 100-101.

⁶Ibid.

the most for the students' development even within the point of view the school is anxious to promote."⁷ Keith Bridston, an American who has been on the staff of the World's Student Christian Federation, points up the problem of narrow theological education by his suggestion that "many churches which are member churches of the World Council of Churches have not recognized that this fact should make some difference in the way their theological students should be trained."⁸ For the churches and Christians who profess to believe in freedom of inquiry, this is a practical denial of their profession. For there to be any practical widespread freedom of inquiry there must be better understanding by the ministers and directors of religious education of the beliefs and practices of other denominations and other religions.

Loyalty to truth also requires that there be practical provision of the opportunity for free-inquiry study in religious education with youth and adults. Murray expresses his concern that "there is far too much intimidation by theologians or by would-be theologians over the

⁷Ibid.

⁸Keith Bridston, "Theological Education and the World's Student Christian Federation." (Unpublished): Summarized and cited by the World's Student Christian Federation, "Our Task of Theological Education," a report presented by the Sub-Committee on this subject at the General Committee of the W.S.C.F. at Nasrapur, [India], with an appendix summarizing some questions and suggestions made by Keith Bridston, The Student World, XLVI (Third Quarter, 1953), 254.

souls and consciences of those who are beginning the Christian life."⁹ Busy ministers are too easily tempted to hand out the answers rather than take the time to help people engage in the kind of study which helps them arrive at meaningful answers in the light of available evidence. John C. Bennett states his belief that "God in His own dealings with men has avoided the overwhelming of their minds and consciences by His power even in the interests of His truth and their salvation."¹⁰ He calls attention to ". . . the importance of enabling persons to come to see the truth for themselves, from their own insight . . ." and then asserts that ". . . when men coerce the minds of other men through false inducements or through playing upon fears, they sin against love, for they tempt their neighbours to be hypocrites."¹¹ Our loyalty to truth, our recognition of our own limitations, and the relative nature of all statements of truth should lead us to a more humble approach to teaching the Gospel.

It must be recognized that what is being recommended here is difficult. It is difficult because of the pressure of time and many things to do and not enough people to do them. It is also difficult because the ministers usually are not adequately qualified because they have usually had to specialize too much in their own denominational thinking and practice. But another difficulty is the demand

⁹ Murray, pp. 152-53.

¹⁰ Bennett, The Ecumenical Review, IX (Oct., 1966), 7.

¹¹ Ibid.

for positive conclusions upon which decisions may be based. Some friends of the writer have two teen-age children just entering adolescence. The family has moved, and for a combination of reasons is now attending a local church with a very narrow outlook. However, the two teen-agers "like the definite teaching" they are getting, even though their parents are concerned about the quality of it. There does need to be teaching with real content and challenge, and definite possible conclusions should be brought to the attention of the learners after they have explored a difficult point. But after the learners have wrestled with the problem being studied, then professions of personal faith are in order and desirable, especially in a local church situation. But let the definite teaching have breadth of content and perspective behind it and let the learner feel free to choose his own conclusion.

D. Campbell Wyckoff, a Professor of Christian Education at Princeton Theological Seminary, in his book The Task of Christian Education refers to a girl who had been reared in a Protestant family and married a boy who had also been reared a Protestant. He writes that when the couple went to live in a large "Protestant" city of our country, they went shopping for a church home. They finally joined the Roman Catholic Church because, he writes, it was ". . . the only Church where they felt they had found a clear account

of what the Church taught."¹² This illustration suggests several questions. First, if the couple referred to had been given the kind of Christian education being recommended here, there would surely have been the basis for an intelligent choice, even though the choice might seem unwise to Protestants. Second, there are many Protestant churches that are quite definite in their teachings, and some of them are not on the fundamentalist or conservative side; the couple may not have looked very far. Third, in statements of faith, and where a definite challenge has to be met as would seem to have been the situation in the case referred to by Wyckoff, definite statements of faith should be made, but with the responsibility to follow them up later with the broader supporting data and considerations. Fourth, if the broader teaching work had been done earlier, the couple should have known what the various denominations teach and mean; then they would be less likely to be swept off their feet and make a hasty decision in the thrill of having an authoritarian church or minister presume to answer all their religious questions for them. If people have really learned to think, they are much less likely to let someone do their thinking for them. The demand is not so much for indoctrination as for helping and challenging our people to learn to think and leading them into the

¹²D. Campbell Wyckoff, The Task of Christian Education (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), p. 56.

problems of interpretation and decision which require that they think.

The Question of Unorthodox Teaching

If there is to be freedom of inquiry, can there be any limitation of unorthodox teaching? Or do both orthodox teaching and unorthodox teaching limit free inquiry? In view of the relative validity of all statements of truth, must not all opinions have an opportunity to be heard freely and understood lest a part of truth be overlooked or error accepted uncritically? Surely we must admit that a religious group has a right to teach its beliefs; it has a right to require to be taught what it considers to be true or orthodox. Therefore, it would also have the right to prevent teaching it considered to be unorthodox. But also let it be recognized that dogmatic teaching does limit the practical opportunity of free inquiry and does tend to pass on the views of the past, or the views of the teacher, as the only acceptable views. This problem has been complicated by the view held by some that unless a particular belief is professed, salvation is missed by that person. But as we have repeatedly pointed out in this study on authority and freedom, the primary requirements for entrance into God's kingdom are not particular doctrinal professions but a spirit and quality of life. This naturally suggests that the questions of orthodoxy or unorthodoxy are beside the point unless the point is this very spirit and quality of life. It is fortunate that we have available

copies of the primary sources of information about the life and teachings of Jesus, as well as numerous writings which make evident much of the development and practice within the Church through the centuries. In our day much more emphasis should be put upon first-hand confrontation of the learners with primary sources of information and argument so the learners can experience the problem of what was actually meant by Jesus, or by Paul, and then honestly search for the best possible answers to the questions which confuse them. With this kind of an approach, the goal is not orthodoxy or unorthodoxy, but truth. Also, since our previous discussion has shown that each person needs to make his own decisions if he is to grow to the fullest in his spiritual life, we should encourage the honest search for truth rather than the teaching of a narrow orthodoxy or unorthodoxy.

It is here that the rationale for the denominational college or university meets its greatest challenge. Unfortunately it must be admitted that many students entering college are not prepared to think for themselves religiously. Therefore, it may be reasoned that they must be protected from unorthodox teaching, and unChristian associations, so their faith will not be contaminated. This writer has seen the disastrous effects on some students who were not prepared to meet the challenge. Given the authoritarian approach, there is no place in the educational process or in life where

the authority from the outside can be safely relaxed. Once the attempt is made to substantiate a teaching by an appeal to reason or experience, a new authority is called into play which stands in judgment on the previous external authority. This writer is not suggesting that all church-related colleges and universities should be discontinued, but he does mean to suggest that the nonauthoritarian teaching approach should be used in the local churches both to make available vital first-hand study for growing Christians and to make possible the free search for Christian truth from within the Christian fellowship. With mature Christian faith and breadth of information and understanding comes the foundation for consistent Christian living and thinking which can meet the challenge of non-Christian thinking with an open mind and a counter challenge.

The argument for denominational colleges would have much more of a semblance of validity if the work denominational colleges were doing constituted significant contributions in the fields of Christian life and thought. In his foreword to The Religion of College Teachers by R. H. Edwin Espy, Dr. Shedd refers to the disappointing work of the church-related colleges as follows:

In view of the widespread concern among educators in general it is surprising and disturbing to learn from this study that among these church college teachers "there is little evidence of profound intellectual wrestling with the problems of relationship between faith and fact, 'revealed'

truth and scientific truth, religious method and educational method, religion and integrated curriculum.¹³

Dr. Shedd also expresses his concern at the ". . . religious conformity which is approved by the community and the constituency of the college . . ." rather than ". . . more of fresh, creative thinking on the nature of religion and the demands it makes on the individual, on education, and on society than one would expect to find elsewhere."¹⁴

Espy notes that "one-half of those who give definite replies [to his question on the definition of God] accept the most conservative of seven proffered definitions of God, taken largely from the Apostles' Creed . . ."¹⁵ Espy also points out that ". . . the basic religious orientation stems chiefly from precollege experience," and states that "on seven primarily religious questions, 53 per cent of the teachers considered the precollege period as most important in the determination of their views, 19 per cent cited the college period, 9 per cent the graduate period, and 14 per cent the period since completion of their graduate work."¹⁶ Further, ". . . the teachers attributing the greatest

¹³Clarence Prouty Shedd, "Foreword," in The Religion of College Teachers. The Beliefs, Practices, and Religious Preparation of Faculty Members in Church-Related Colleges, by R. H. Edwin Espy (New York: Association Press, 1951), p. xi.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. xi-xii.

¹⁵Espy, p. 156.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 161-62.

importance to later periods and academic influences are for the most part those whose religious views are more 'liberal,' or sometimes negative."¹⁷ Thus, it would seem from Espy's study that the church-related colleges are doing primarily one thing--providing a college where the kind of religious teaching and attitudes favored by the constituency prevail. This is understandable, but it is nevertheless inadequate and a great loss of opportunity. This writer has had adult women in state university classes in religion which he taught on a free inquiry basis. Some of them had attended church-related colleges and studied in religion courses there, but, as one lady stated, "they never got down to the issues." This was the writer's own experience in the religion courses he studied in a church-related college. If the church-related college is to justify itself, it must do much more than provide a hot-house atmosphere for tender religious faith and consciences.

The church-related college has a responsibility to the free search for truth and understanding which should not be ignored. What better place should there be for the raising of the basic issues and doubts than an academic community of Christians? If the method of free-inquiry, nondogmatic teaching were utilized, the students would have an opportunity to face the issues and questions which

¹⁷Ibid.

a vital Christianity directs to every society in every age. Unless this is done, the church-related colleges are not worth the expense, and it would be better to spend the money to support strongly staffed student programs at our state-supported and private institutions of higher learning. It might also be better if the faculties in the denominational colleges were spread among the state-supported institutions, thus making a better representation of Christian concerns on the campuses where the issues can really be faced. It might also challenge the professors who are now in the church-related colleges to wrestle with more of the basic issues facing our society. The issue should not be orthodoxy or unorthodoxy, but truth, and this demands freedom of inquiry. The church-related colleges must meet this challenge.

The Role of the Christian Teacher

At no point is the difference between the authoritarian and nonauthoritarian approaches to truth and its propagation greater than in the role the teacher is expected to fill. With the view that truth is completely given, and only to be handed down, the teacher becomes the purveyor of divine truth which must not be questioned by either the teacher or the learner. For the most complete authoritarian approach to education, there is no better example than the educational system of the Jesuits and the "Spiritual Exercises" of Loyola. Dr. Rood points out how similar the

Jesuit plan is to the plan used by John Sturm at Strassburg in the Reformation Period.¹⁸ "The Ratio Studiorum of 1599" leaves no question concerning what the Jesuits thought should be taught, and they exercised the greatest care to insure there was complete obedience in teachers and pupils. The teachers were to avoid new opinions and "even in matters where there is no risk to faith and devotion, no one shall introduce new questions in matters of great moment, or any opinion which does not have suitable authority."¹⁹ Every teacher was to follow the approved Roman Catholic doctors and ". . . as far as local custom permits, the views accepted in Catholic schools."²⁰ This suggests that where the community might not be sympathetic to the Jesuit schools at first, the Jesuits were careful to work their way into favor gradually. Censors, or praetors, were used to keep the teachers and administrators in touch with the thinking and actions of the students. If the term of censor had bad connotations, another term could be used, ". . . and that he may be respected by his fellow pupils, let him be honored with some privilege, and let him have the right, with the approval of the master, of begging off some lighter penalties for his fellow pupils."²¹ This is really quite clever

¹⁸Rood, p. 515.

¹⁹Ignatius of Loyola, "The Ratio Studiorum of 1599," trans. A. R. Ball and printed in St. Ignatius and the Ratio Studiorum, ed. Edward A. Fitzpatrick (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1933), p. 161.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., p. 187.

and shows the lengths to which the Jesuits went to insure obedience to the superiors.

However, for the ultimate in conditioning a learner, we must turn to the "Spiritual Exercises" of Ignatius Loyola. The method and effect are clearly indicated by the translator in a note on Annotation 15 where he quotes from The Cambridge Modern History as follows:

'In the first part (First Week of the Exercises) the course of the meditations is conducted so as to produce in the neophyte a kind of hypnotism, a passive state in which he will be ready to receive the impression that it is desired to make upon him.'²²

This would seem to be too bald a statement and the translator adds, "But the giver of the Exercises should dread any domineering over the will of the receiver. He should withdraw, 'to let the Creator and Lord Himself communicate Himself to His devout soul.'²³ Further, the exercitant, that is, the one undergoing the exercises, is conditioned to fear hell by the most realistic imaginings possible. He is instructed to imagine the ". . . length, breadth, and depth of hell" and to ask for and want ". . . an intimate sense of the pain that the damned suffer, so that, if through my faults I become forgetful of the love of the Eternal Lord, at least the fear of pains and penalties may be an aid to me not to give way to sin."²⁴ The exercitant is instructed first

²²The Cambridge Modern History, Vol. II, p. 657, quoted by Joseph Rickaby, S.J., in The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, 2d ed. (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd., Publishers to the Holy See, 1936), p. 16.

²³Ibid., p. 16.

²⁴Ibid., p. 40.

". . . to see with the eye of imagination those great fires, and those souls as it were in bodies of fire. . . . To hear with the ears lamentations, howlings, cries, blasphemies against Christ our Lord and against all His Saints. . . . With the sense of smell, to smell smoke, brimstone, refuse and rottenness . . . to taste with the taste bitter things, as tears, sadness, and the worm of conscience . . . to feel with the sense of touch how those fires do touch and burn souls.²⁵

This is powerful suggestion to give to a person who is in a kind of hypnotic state! It leads to the greatest possible subservience which is clearly stated in "The Sentiments that should be held in the Church militant" as follows: "The first: laying aside all criticism, we ought to hold our mind ready and prompt to obey in all things the true Spouse of Christ our Lord, which is our Holy Mother the Hierarchical Church."²⁶ but the thirteenth sentiment goes even further; it reads: "to make sure of being right in all things, we ought always to hold by the principle that the white that I see I would believe to be black, if the Hierarchical Church were so to rule it . . . "²⁷ At the end of these "sentiments" the translator writes: "Tremendous at times is the strain of faith upon a man who has the leisure and capacity to think. What such a man wants is a devotion to and confidence in the Church equally 'tremendous.' "²⁸ This sounds like a confession,

²⁵Ibid., pp. 40-41.

²⁶Ibid., p. 220.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., p. 221.

and well it might be. This is the nadir to which authoritarian teaching can fall. It makes a man a pawn of the generals of his order or of the head of the institutional church. Surely this is not the role of the Christian teacher as seen by the nonauthoritarian churches.

If we believe in the freedom of man to think for himself, and the necessity of that thinking, then something far different from the thorough conditioning of the "Spiritual Exercises" is necessary. The authoritarian approach is tempting because we know people can learn statements of doctrine and thereby appear to be religiously educated. Murray refers to the seeming advantage that "religions of authority" have over the "religions of the spirit" and notes that the authoritarian approach ". . . creates in the minds of some people an almost superstitious attachment to doctrine, so that they feel all the emotions of fear and anger if afterwards they hear it challenged."²⁹ But the great danger is that while this familiarity with doctrine ". . . has a great deal to do with church membership, it has nothing necessarily to do with religion."³⁰ This is the most pertinent comment that could be made and suggests the necessity for those who believe in freedom of thought and religion to teach so that their students learn to think and grow spiritually in their own right. Bertocci thinks that ". . . the fact of freedom

²⁹Murray, p. 142.

³⁰Ibid.

becomes the first fact . . . to be respected about the other person," and that whether the other person ". . . uses his reason to rationalize, or to discover truth, is the problem of his life as he seeks to direct his wants and desires and to discover the full meaning of his experiences."³¹ Dr. Otwell speaks of "true religious leadership" as ". . . the work of evocation, not persuasion."³² Blance Carrier characterizes the good teacher as one whose ". . . habitual attitude is one of prayer and faith and honesty with himself and others."³³ She comments that "a teacher of young people does not need to be dogmatic but can be quite open to new truth, full of wonder, undismayed and unafraid of skepticism among his students, if he himself is discovering the true meaning of life."³⁴ It is from this kind of person that religion can be "caught"--it is the attraction of a spirit and a faith that is sure of itself but not dogmatic or proud.

In The Advancement of Theological Education, Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson give considerable attention to the kind of teaching that is needed in our theological seminaries. They state that "greatness in teaching . . . can be measured by the spaciousness of the spiritual intellectual room in which the

³¹Bertocci, pp. 27-28.

³²Otwell, p. 8.

³³Carrier, p. 144.

³⁴Ibid.

student is brought to move."³⁵ They list three traits of good teaching as follows:

First, the theological teacher must continually be pushing students to examine the ultimate pre-suppositions with which they think and with which they judge themselves and their fellows. . . .

.
The second trait of good teaching is that a close relationship is kept between the formal structure of thought and concrete human problems. . . .

Third, the good teacher gives attention to the relation of his subject to the vocational commitment students have made or are considering for the Christian ministry.³⁶

With slight changes in wording these statements would characterize a good teacher of youth and adults in our churches. This is the kind of teaching that is relevant to life and challenges the learner to grow rather than memorize.

Another danger lurks in the personal attachment of a learner to the teacher, even if the teacher is not courting popularity. This is difficult because we tend to accept with less critical care the opinions of those we like. An enthusiastic teacher with a pleasing personality and some wit can get a following where others could not. Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson call attention to the possible dangers in this regard by pointing out that students ". . . may respond more to the impact of a personality than to ideas communicated."³⁷ The real danger is that the student may get emotional satisfaction

³⁵Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson, p. 142.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 142-43.

³⁷Ibid., p. 169.

rather than increased understanding of the Christian faith, and his loyalty may be directed more to the teacher than to the Christian faith.³⁸ This writer has seen this kind of result both in seminary and college students. Ministers also face a similar problem, especially in the free churches where there is less emphasis on liturgy and more on the sermon and the minister. It is unfair to a learner to be tied emotionally primarily to the teacher or minister; responsible Christian teaching points the learner on to Christ and God. It is of course normal for learners to appreciate the assistance which teachers and ministers have given them in their growing understanding, but the teachers and ministers themselves should not bask in the appreciation of followers, but point their followers on to Christ and God.

But should Christians not try to persuade others to be Christian? Should they not reason with others and witness to their faith in the Christian Gospel? But that depends upon the nature of the Christian faith and what brings significant spiritual growth. If Christian faith is a matter of acceptance of particular statements of doctrine, then strong persuasion would be in order. But if Christian faith is essentially an attitude and spirit toward God, Christ, and one's fellowmen, and is judged by its fruits, then the most important thing is the sincere Christian spirit of love and compassion toward God, Christ, and one's fellowmen. In this view of Christian faith,

³⁸Ibid.

doctrine is at a minimum, as it was in the teachings of Jesus, and the most important point is not for a person to profess acceptance of Christian doctrine, but to become one in spirit with God and Christ and to love and serve his fellowmen.

It is interesting that Roman Catholics approach teaching and missionary work with a careful use of techniques of persuasion. William E. McManus, Assistant Director of the Department of Education of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, in discussing "Trends in Roman Catholic Education" as part of a symposium in Religious Education magazine, writes that most "Catholic educators . . . would agree . . . that today's graduates, in comparison with those of ten or fifteen years ago, are . . . more efficiently trained in the delicate art of persuading their associates and neighbors to accept the truths 'that make men free'--the art which Catholics call the 'apostolate of the laity.'"³⁹ It would be interesting to know more of what is implied in this statement, but it is suggestive of the calculated persuading of a person to accept a preconceived conclusion, which is natural with the authoritarian approach.

A study by a graduate student at the Catholic University of America in 1948 deals with the question of suggestibility. The author writes:

³⁹William E. McManus, "Trends in Roman Catholic Education," Part II of "Trends in Religious Education, a Symposium," Religious Education, XLVIII (Jan.-Feb., 1953), 13.

The scientific analysis of a large sample of subjects in a wide variety of situations reveals that there is a phenomenon in our psychological life whereby we respond passively, uncritically, involuntarily to a mental influence arising from the persons or conditions in our environment and occasionally arising within the person himself--this phenomenon we call suggestibility. . . . The fact that everyone is suggestible to some extent is evident from this data wherein, using 223 subjects and 16 tests of suggestibility, 12 per cent of the subjects accepted the suggestion on all 16 tests, 25.4 per cent were suggestible on 15 tests, 22.4 per cent on 14 tests, 19.2 per cent on 13, 13 per cent on 12, 4.5 per cent on 11, 3.1 per cent on 10, and .5 per cent on 9; all of the subjects proved suggestible on at least nine of the tests.⁴⁰

The uncritical, passive, and involuntary nature of suggestibility, as indicated by Grimes' study, make it of very questionable service for a nonauthoritarian approach to religious education and teaching. Grimes summarizes studies which indicate that known group opinion and prestige are significant authority factors, and he points out that ". . . the effect was greater when statements were attributed to well-liked persons . . . "41 Grimes also discovered that "auto-suggestion was nearly twice as effective as prestige suggestion. . . . "42 Grimes comments that "this fact and a consideration of the other tests show that the more subtle

⁴⁰Francis V. Grimes, An Experimental Analysis of the Nature of Suggestibility and of Its Relation to Other Psychological Factors (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1948), p. 33. (This study was originally a dissertation submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D. degree. The subjects were boys from eight to fifteen years old living in an orphan home for boys.)

⁴¹Ibid., p. 8.

⁴²Ibid., p. 35.

the test, the more the suggestion is made to come from the subject himself, the more likely it is to be accepted and the greater the degree of acceptance."⁴³ This has far-reaching implications and possibilities. It first suggests that individual experience is still the primary factor in determining the decisions of individuals when a person is left free to think for himself. But second, the subtlety with which suggestions may be made to appear to a person as his own ideas opens the way for manipulation, rather than education of a free person. Grimes recognizes the responsibility of those who have this information when he writes:

The normal suggestibility of everyone, the 'confidence' the better minds place in the 'prestige of authority' and especially the tendency to extreme suggestibility among the young and the weak in personality throws into bold relief the responsibility of all to guide their actions by the knowledge of these principles, and it especially underlines the responsibilities of teachers and those in authority; it makes clear the importance of using the power of suggestibility for good and not for harm.⁴⁴

For the nonauthoritarian person who believes in the necessity of the freedom of the individual to make his own decisions as he matures in life, the suggestibility of students as indicated by Grimes' study makes his teaching work more difficult. Although others may utilize the suggestibility of people to manipulate them into acceptance of a preconceived decision, education in freedom and into

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 36.

freedom requires that the learner be made aware of his suggestibility and the uncritical nature of it. At no point is the radical difference between the authoritarian and non-authoritarian approaches more evident than here. Part of the development of the spiritual person is his awareness of his weaknesses and strengths, and the ways he can so easily be influenced for evil; the responsible nonauthoritarian educator has the task of helping the learner learn to know himself as a fallible child of God who nevertheless can grow in the image of God--into a loving, thinking person who is not easily influenced by those who would manipulate him. Jesus was this kind of person and cautioned men against a shallow view of the Christian life⁴⁵ and against thinking there was no cost.⁴⁶ The role of the Christian teacher or minister is not to manipulate or "suggest" another person into a profession of Christian faith, but to lead persons into the encounter with the claims of God in the Christian Gospel, where each must answer to God. It is here that a teacher or minister may serve as evidence for the Christian faith by the very kind of spiritual person he is. This is the only kind of persuasion that is fair to those who look to Christian teachers and ministers for help. This does not mean that the witness of the person as a person is not supplemented by explanation and

⁴⁵The Sermon on the Mount as collected in Matt. 5-7 is an excellent example of this.

⁴⁶Lk. 14:25-33; cf. Matt. 10:37-38. See also Lk. 12:51-53 and Matt. 10:34-36.

discussion, but these are secondary. Descriptions by Christians of their religious experiences may be very helpful and are very important evidence, but the learner must be left free to make his own decision about the meaning of this evidence for his own life. And since those who feel they have actually been accosted or invaded by God are a comparatively small minority of Christians, we should be careful not to make such an experience appear to be the only basis for Christian faith. There can develop an awareness of the reality of God and a full response to His call as mediated through the Gospel and the witness of other Christians which brings a very high degree of certainty and a total response in love and commitment.

There are other problems facing those who would be nonauthoritarian teachers, such as the practical problem of how the nonauthoritarian churches can successfully meet the challenge of the authoritarian churches, and the problem of how to keep the Bible from being a divisive factor rather than a unifying power in the life of the Church and the churches, including a local church. However, these questions are best discussed in connection with teaching proposals designed to provide the kind of teaching approach and study experience that will enable and challenge the interested person to grow into mature Christian faith with responsibility and devotion.

After considering the problem of teaching posed by

the issue of authority and freedom in the Protestant Churches in America, it appears that we should attempt to teach the people in our churches the best that we know but that included in the best that we know should be loyalty to truth and free inquiry. Thus, Christian education should not be primarily indoctrination but the providing of the experiences and opportunities which lead a person into the study which makes it possible for him to gain the basis for making intelligent religious choices. This requires acquaintance with the various opinions, which should stimulate thought and provide the basis for intelligent decision. Christian doctrine should be taught, but not as infallible truth; the important question is not orthodoxy or unorthodoxy, but truth. The Christian teacher should be a compassionate helper to the learner rather than a dictator or manipulator who insists on bringing the learner to a preconceived conclusion. It is necessary that the Christian teacher avoid the extreme personal attachment with learners which unduly influences the decisions of the learners. Persuasion in any sense which encourages a learner to look at only one side of a question or which results in manipulation of the learner is to be avoided. Our goal in teaching adolescents and adults should be to help the learner gain the experience which will enable him to think and grow in his own right as a Christian. We may tell him what we and others think, but we should not tell him what he must think. We should encourage him to think, help him learn

to think, and then respect his honest thoughts.

Now let us consider principles and methods which should be helpful in providing positive, nonauthoritarian, Christian education.

PART IV

TEACHING WITH FAITH

AND FREEDOM

deserving of his highest loyalty. For the Christian this highest loyalty is to the truth about God and about life as known in experience because truth cannot be known outside of experience. This experience of each individual was seen to include in varying degrees the experience of other persons living and dead, and the experience of God and His claim upon us. It has also been reasoned that the individual has the right and the responsibility before God to evaluate his experiences and the experiences and claims of others without being dictated to by anyone claiming religious authority. It has been stated that free inquiry is necessary to make possible the evaluation of claimed truth and the search for new truth, and that the Christian teacher has the responsibility for respecting the right of every person to hear both sides of the various questions about life and truth, and to be encouraged and challenged to make his own decision before God. Now it is time to consider the practical problems involved in providing the kind of Christian educational experience for adolescents, college students, and adults which meets the needs of our people today and which allows them the live alternative of Christian education in faith and freedom. This writer does not assay to say the last word on this subject, but hopes to make a contribution as study and experience make possible.

What Good Teaching Does

Good teaching in Christian education for adolescents,

college students, and adults does essentially three things: it leads the learners into confrontation with the problems of life; it leads them into the study of Church history and Christian doctrine and into the study of the Bible where the greatest witness to the reality and love of God and His loving call to us is recorded, and it challenges the learner to become a Christian but respects his God-given right to reject the Christian call and the opportunity which God offers. The good teacher recognizes that life confronts everyone with problems to solve and decisions to make. Every person is interested in his problems; therefore the place to start in Christian education is where the individual is in his problems and interests. Of course, in groups there may not be an exact identity of problems in the members of the group, but the various age groups have much in common, and usually face similar problems. For example, most married couples face the problem of how to answer the religious questions of their children, and are often confronted in the process with their own religious ignorance and uncertainty. Most young people face problems of courtship and marriage, or if they don't, wish they did, and are interested in thinking on the problems involved. Teachers may sometimes feel that those they are trying to teach do not know what their real needs are; this may often be true, but the teacher still must contact the learner where he is and where he is interested before the learner can be led to recognize and face his deeper needs.

Good teaching also recognizes the key importance of the Bible in the Christian education of all ages because it is here that we have the most original statements of the teachings of Jesus and the call of God to all to enter his kingdom. But it is also true that the Bible is one of the greatest problems in Christian education because of the differences of opinion concerning its meaning and interpretation. Good teaching leads the learners into first-hand experience of these difficulties and into consideration of possible intelligent solutions of them, so that the learner gets beyond the technical questions to the appreciation of the great truths taught in the Bible. Then the Bible can become the greatest resource of the Christian life because it is no longer a catalog of proof texts nor a puzzle which mystifies a person, but a collection of writings testifying to the action and revelation of God in history, and man's thinking and response to God. Further, good Christian education leads the learner into the study of the Christian Church and the development of doctrine and practice so that the learner can see for himself what led to the formulation of the various doctrines and what was intended by them. Then the learner can be in a position to evaluate doctrine and accept it or refine or restate it as he deems best in the light of the evidence. Likewise, the learner needs to study the development of the various practices and administrative patterns within the churches in order to be an informed and responsible person within his own church.

Good teaching in the Church also confronts the learner with the challenge to accept the call of God to enter his

kingdom and serve his fellowmen. There comes a time for decision, perhaps repeated decisions as the understanding and implications of the Christian Gospel deepen, and the conscious commitment needs to be made to the highest the person knows and understands. Good teaching repeatedly confronts the learners with the call to Christian commitment and living.

Good teaching also respects honest differences of opinion and recognizes the necessity of leaving a person free to agree or disagree with the teacher or particular doctrines. Murray comments that "the education of conscience does not mean bringing up children to agree with you and putting the fear of God into them if they do not."² Rather, the learner should be respected for conducting himself according to his best insights and understanding, and helped, if possible, to see the need for continued growth toward the highest goal. Good teaching is not the coercion of opinion or the manipulation of persons and evidence to make them say what the teacher wants. Rather, good teaching leads the learner into the experiences and acquaintance with the evidence which makes possible his own informed and intelligent decisions. This is especially true when teaching adolescents, college students, and adults who have the mental capacity to think and evaluate for themselves, for most problems are not really understood unless they are seen from the inside; the truths of Christianity are confirmed in living and not in a priori faith. We should teach the best we know about the various

²Murray, p. 136.

problems of life and faith, but this should include a fair hearing for opposing points of view and freedom of choice for the learner. It is not intended here to suggest that everyone must inquire into the minute detail of every question, but the opportunity and encouragement to do so should be available if a person desires to make a detailed and free-inquiry study of any doctrine or question. The teacher should encourage and facilitate rather than discourage such study. The teacher should not take the responsibility for not bringing some evidence to the attention of the learner nor for influencing the learner to decide other than his best judgment in the light of the evidence would lead him. Rather, the teacher should help the learner learn to evaluate evidence and claims about evidence so that he can make intelligent choices. It is not intended to suggest that the teacher must be absolutely noncommittal and cold in his teaching, but the good teacher should be careful to include, along with his own statements of position on various issues, fair and typical statements of other positions and sympathetic explanations of why some people adhere to them. The good teacher is a teacher, not a dictator or a dogmatist.

Reasons for Nonsectarian Teaching

In addition to the reasons already given for leading learners into a consideration of the divergent opinions on Christian doctrines and the Bible, there is another very practical reason which is suggested by recent studies of the opinions and practices of people within our Protestant

churches regarding denominational loyalty. In an address before the North American Faith and Order Study Conference at Oberlin, Ohio, last September, Walter G. Muelder, Dean and Professor of Ethics in the Boston University School of Theology, refers to a "Minneapolis Discussion Group" which dealt with "Doctrinal Consensus and Conflict." He stated that "a wide variety of denominations was represented in this study group," and that "their work was focused on 5,000 responses to a checklist questionnaire, which indicated a broad homogeneity in expressions of theological faith."³ According to the findings of this group,

. . . a kind of theological ecumenicity already exists within each of the denominations. . . . On four of the theological areas surveyed all the respondents could be included in the Methodist Church without increasing the diversity which is already represented by the Methodist clergy. Ninety-four percent could join the Lutheran or Presbyterian churches without increasing the diversity in views of the Bible, which already exist in the clergy of these denominations. Approximately the same would be true with regard to the doctrine of Christ and the ground of salvation. Seventy-two percent could be Episcopalian or Lutherans on the doctrine of the Sacrament of Baptism, and more than ninety-five percent could be Presbyterians. Four or five possible positions on the Lord's Supper are taken by Episcopal clergy and these account for 96.38 percent of the total responses.⁴

The Report of Division III of the North American Faith and Order Study Conference states that ". . . one out of five people in North America move every year; from 30 to 50

³Walter G. Muelder, "Institutionalism in Relation to Unity and Disunity." An Address at the North American Faith and Order Study Conference, Oberlin, Ohio, Sept., 1957, p. 2. (Mimeographed.)

⁴Ibid., pp. 2-3.

per cent of the membership of average congregations come from some other denominational background; 50 per cent of the present membership of the average urban church has been added within the past ten years."⁵ As a result of the study of the religious beliefs of a sample of the undergraduate students at Harvard and Radcliffe as referred to earlier,⁶ it was found that there was "... a high degree of agreement with the proposition that 'denominational distinctions, at least within Protestant Christianity, are out of date, and may as well be eliminated as rapidly as possible.'"⁷ In fact, 57 per cent of the students agreed the Protestant denominational distinctions are out of date, while only 19 per cent disagreed, and the others didn't have an opinion.⁸

William Frederick Dunkle, Jr., minister of Grace Methodist Church in Wilmington, Delaware, begins an article in the March, 1957 New Christian Advocate with the words: "Mobile and marrying America is developing a practical ecumenism. Increasingly, people cross denominational lines

⁵World Council of Churches, "The Nature of the Unity We Seek in View of Cultural Pressures," Report of Division III of the North American Faith and Order Study Conference, Oberlin, Ohio, Sept., 1957, p. 2. (Mimeographed.)

⁶See above, p. 277.

⁷Allport, p. 43.

⁸Ibid.

when they move or marry."⁹ In 1948 when Dunkle served as chairman of the Department of Evangelism of the Virginia Council of Churches, he sent a questionnaire to one hundred selected Protestant pastors. In 1951 while serving as chairman of the evangelism committee of the Council of Churches of Wilmington, Delaware, he interviewed twenty-five clergymen in Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. Dunkle suggests or implies that when a couple marry, they will likely join the church of the one who is the more active in church; that when they move, they may tend to go to the church close to them, or to the church where their children start going to Sunday School or church with newly found friends. He thinks "this is all to the good," and reasons that it is better to have the family active in some church than "a 'former' anything!"¹⁰ Dunkle urges interdenominational cooperation in the area of transfers of membership from one denomination to another, and suggests how this could be facilitated. He gives pertinent information on membership procedures in several denominations and lists the consensus of the twenty-five pastors he interviewed in 1951 as four guiding principles for interdenominational ethics in this area. He also presents a suggested letter notifying a church of which a person has been a member

⁹William Frederick Dunkle, Jr., "Transferring Members with Other Churches," The New Christian Advocate, I (Mar., 1957), 36.

¹⁰Ibid.

of this person's intention to become a member of another church, presumably of another denomination.¹¹

In view of these statistics on denominational mobility of thirty to fifty per cent of the membership of many of our Protestant churches, and the unconcern for strict denominational loyalty on the part of many more people in our Protestant churches, surely our programs of Christian education should fairly and honestly include the teachings and practices of other denominations. This does not mean that we should ignore the differences, but we should understand what they are and gain the background information to understand their development and evaluate their validity. With young people better informed concerning the beliefs and practices of their own denomination and the beliefs and practices of others, there could be much less difficulty in marriage between persons who have contradictory religious views. This kind of information would be especially helpful in the problem of prospective marriages between Protestant and Roman Catholic persons. From experience in counseling with university students in this area, the writer knows how little most Protestant young people know of the Roman Catholic teaching and practice in this matter and how unresourceful many Protestants are in facing the problem once they have become emotionally attached.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 37-40.

The interdenominational nature of Biblical and historical scholarship also underlines the practicality of nonsectarian teaching even in our local churches. If more attention were given to the needs of the learners for first-hand experience and study of the problems that confront us as Christians, we would be less concerned about particular denominations within the nonauthoritarian churches and would strive to help people be growing Christians who happen to be members of a particular local church. We have a great opportunity to bring our churches even closer together by nonsectarian teaching in our churches.

Adolescents Are Human

To teach effectively, we need to understand the emotional needs of people as well as their intellectual questions. This is especially relevant to the teaching of adolescents. It is common knowledge that the adolescent is often a problem to himself and everyone with whom he comes in contact. Allport states that it is usually during adolescence that ". . . the youth is compelled to transform his religious attitudes--indeed all his attitudes--from second-hand fittings to first-hand fittings of his personality." and that "he can no longer let his parents do his thinking for him."¹² Further, "various studies show that for approximately two-thirds of all children there is a reaction against parental

¹²Allport, p. 32.

and cultural teaching."¹³ Blanche Carrier suggests that we might list ". . . the three primary needs of the adolescent in the church as being freedom from parental authority; a resolution of his conflicts in relation to his sexual, mental and psychological upsurge; and an ideal that is dynamic enough to claim his loyalty in the face of disillusionment."¹⁴ These needs of the adolescent we must always keep in mind and attempt to make ourselves available for help rather than maintain a claimed authority. And what more appropriate time could there be for honest, free-inquiry study of the origins and meanings of Christianity and Christian doctrine? The adolescent is going to question the authority of others over him anyway. It is only natural that he will have doubts and questions about the faith in which he has been nurtured if he comes from a Christian home, and he should have the opportunity to ask and seek answers to his honest doubts and questions. This is the path to emotional and religious maturity; let us make it possible for him to travel it without having to reject religion to establish his own freedom. Rather, let us facilitate his study by helping him become acquainted with the best materials, first-hand wherever possible, and by

¹³Ibid. (He refers to E. D. Starbuck, Psychology of Religion (London: W. Scott Co., 1899, p. 232; also G. W. Allport, J. M. Gillespie, J. Young, "The Religion of the Post-War College Student," Journal of Psychology, 1948, 25, 3-33.)

¹⁴Carrier, p. 197.

treating every sincere question with respect, even though from our viewpoint, some questions may seem uncalled for or adolescent.

The college or university student is usually in later adolescence and has already freed himself from much of parental authority, unless the exercise of parental authority has been so extreme that the student cannot escape from it while living at home. But there are other interests and concerns of the later adolescent who is often a college student. Murray writes that "things as they are, things as they are thought to be and things as they ought to be are the perpetual concern of the later adolescent."¹⁵ He speaks of the ". . . wrestling with circumstances and with conflicting wills and with innate tendencies to evil . . ." as marking ". . . the passage into adult life of every person of character . . ."¹⁶ Therefore, we must recognize that ". . . the 'religious education' which we need at this stage is not propaganda on behalf of a specific creed but a recognition that man's life is a warfare upon this earth and woe betide the man who treats it otherwise."¹⁷

But what do college students think their needs are and what is their evaluation of available religious programs for them? At the 1953 meetings of the Los Angeles, California,

¹⁵Murray, p. 90.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

Chapter of the Religious Education Association, one Seminar dealt with the question "What Does the University Student Think About the Gap Between the Needs of Youth and the Church Program?" The attitudes of the students on the panel are summarized by Edward Zerlin as follows:

(1) the church and synagogue programs are not sufficiently virile from an intellectual point of view; (2) church leadership is inadequate; (3) the quality of teaching in the religious educational program is below the standard to which young people are accustomed in schools and colleges; (4) there is too little search into the basic interests of youth; (5) the church has set itself up as the source of all wisdom and experience and does not trust the students to work out their own way; (6) life's needs should not be equated with "redemption"; a religious experience is the seeing of one's own life in the total configuration of real needs and interests; and (7) the church is not realistic--the church attitude of "God will take care of it" is not sufficiently realistic to cope with such problems, for example, as discrimination in a fraternity.¹⁸

Discussion which followed the panel presentation emphasized the following:

. . . traditions can be creative when they are used as a resource rather than as a dogma and lead the individual to the discovery of new insights.

. . . it is strongly urged that the church should place "more emphasis on the quality of the experience offered and the worth-whileness of the activity presented, rather than upon frills and the spectacular."¹⁹

These expressions of opinion by college students do not necessarily mean that they are an analysis of the deeper

¹⁸ Edward Zerlin, "Youth and the House of God," A Report of the 1953 meetings of the Los Angeles, California, Chapter of the Religious Education Association, Religious Education, XLIX (Jan.-Feb., 1954), 49-50.

¹⁹Ibid.

needs of these students, but they are important information for anyone who would do religious work with college students. These opinions represent thoughts and feelings that must be satisfied if the students holding them are to be reached with the Christian message. This does not mean that these thoughts and feelings are necessarily correct or desirable, but they must not be ignored or treated lightly, for to do so is to treat the student that way. Furthermore, on the basis of this writer's experience in doing religious work with college and university students, he would suggest that the student attitudes are surprisingly sound and indicate the desirability of the nonauthoritarian teaching approach in religious education that is being advocated in this study. The opinion that the church is not realistic would be true of some churches and not of others. The view of tradition as a source is sound in view of the necessity of free inquiry to arrive at and test statements of truth.

The fact that ". . . only about 60 per cent of the [Protestant] students who feel the need for a religious orientation find the system in which they were reared satisfactory to their needs" should also help those who do religious work with college students to understand the necessity for a broad teaching approach which helps the students gain the basis upon which intelligent religious choices can be made. Liston Pope, Dean of the Yale University Divinity School, expresses the opinion that religion

has a better opportunity now for a hearing on college campuses than at any time in the last thirty years and suggests that this may be ". . . the time of decision when higher education in America will recapture authentic religious loyalties it has too often simulated or traduced or else lapse for another generation into a skepticism and cynicism deeper than before."²⁰ But he cautions that "the ultimate issue of this new situation will depend very largely on the interest and support of the churches and on whether the churches become, in themselves and in their relations with colleges and students, the kind of churches both intelligence and devotion can command."²¹ The Christian education needed for thinking college students is far beyond any staid indoctrination of favorite beliefs and doctrines. Rather, formal and informal Christian education for college and university students must be a part of the student's search for truth and reality, and it should facilitate his honest evaluation of our religious heritage and his choosing and formulating of his own religious beliefs in the light of his total experience and best thinking. Formal classes in Bible and Religion must be academically equal to or better than any other courses taught in the university. These

²⁰Liston Pope, "Campus Idols and Ideals," The Student World, L (Third Quarter, 1957), 292. (This article was reprinted from Advance magazine, CXLVIII (July 18, 1956), 11-12.

²¹Ibid., p. 293.

courses in Bible and Religion should be taught as non-sectarianly as possible, and with complete freedom of inquiry. The student should not be graded on his personal religious conclusions but on his knowledge of the thinking and evidence in the field of study of the course. The voluntary religious groups should provide the worship opportunities and the challenge and call to complete Christian commitment and living.

In all work with adolescents and college students it is necessary to make provision for the person to think for himself with freedom and without pressure to come to a particular preconceived conclusion. Blanche Carrier notes the normal evaluative process a normal adolescent needs to pursue and comments that ". . . if his relation to his parents has been a happy one, or if his intelligence agrees as to the importance of the idea or custom, or if emotion and reason unite in its favor, he rechooses it as his own personal value."²² She outlines how a Hutterite community in Paraguay, after teaching their children in their own schools, refuses to admit young people as actual members of their community till late adolescence and after they have spent two years away from the Hutterite community and choose

²²Carrier, p. 87.

to return to it and become members of it.²³ Thus, the young person has the opportunity, at least in theory, to make his own religious choice, although socially and emotionally it might be very difficult to break completely with the home community. College and university students in America may have a better opportunity to make a psychologically sound and intelligent religious choice if they attend an institution where high level credit courses in Religion and Bible

²³Ibid., pp. 87-88. (Her more detailed description reads as follows: ". . . The Bruderhof have a large section of land in Paraguay, where they have established a very close and disciplined group life. Of the six hundred persons making up the group, 25 per cent are children. These children are trained in their schools and are brought with their parents to some of the daily religious meetings. Every effort is made to instruct them in Christian doctrine and ethics, but they are not received as members until they reach late adolescence, and not then until they have had two years away from the community during which time they are to examine various ideologies. After an evaluation of the ideals in the world they may choose to return to the community or may pursue other ideals of their choice. In this way their commitment to the community becomes a matter of their own choice; they are considered not as children of the community but as persons in their own right." This is an interesting practice. It would be interesting to know more about how authoritarianly the children are taught within the brotherhood; what percentage choose to return to The Bruderhof; whether girls, also, spend the two years away from The Bruderhof; whether any attempts are made to guide the young people while they are away from The Bruderhof; and whether the young people really do explore carefully other ideologies, or whether they largely congregate together and join in self-righteous denunciation of "the world." This practice of insisting the young people decide for themselves is psychologically sound, as Carrier states, p. 87, but it should also be recognized that, given a very authoritarian childhood training along with the experience of a happy community of friends, the attraction of the community when away from it would likely be very strong for most of the young people. Carrier gives no reference in her book indicating the source of her information.)

are available without penalty of losing necessary credits for graduation, and if voluntary religious groups provide the challenge and the opportunity for personal confrontation and response to the meaning and responsibilities of life.

The Needs of Adults

Religiously, it is more difficult to distinguish between adolescence and adulthood than physically. It has been this writer's experience that high school students, college and university students, and adults have essentially the same religious questions, unless they have had the opportunity for study which enables them to understand the Bible and use it in the light of modern scholarship. These questions often are not asked first, nor are they on the surface to be easily seen. But when the relation is such that people feel they can safely ask their honest questions and express their doubts, they often do. Most adults still feel considerably at a loss to understand and interpret the Bible, except for a few preferred passages, and the problem is complicated by the mistaken confidence which the literalist has that he does know how to interpret the Bible.

Murray refers to Susan Isaacs who said the great needs of children were ". . . for security, affection, and significance. . ." and suggests that these ". . . are, however, needs of people at every age . . ."²⁴ These are ultimately religious needs, for they relate to the meaning and purpose

²⁴Murray, p. 88.

of life. Adults are still human, although they should mature.

But there are particular needs of specific age groups. Most young adults marry, have children, face economic problems, and the religious questions of their children. They also may have some difficulties adjusting to a husband or wife who doesn't seem quite as angelic or heroic as before the marriage ceremony, and the parents of the couple may try to continue to exercise authority over the newly wedded couple. The unmarried young adult is often lonesome, and, if a woman is not a career-minded person and single by choice, she may feel quite insignificant. In our religious education work with these young adults, we should make it possible for them to find fellowship and help in solving their problems and in bringing the insights and help of Christianity as the foundation upon which a mature religious life can be built.

The religious needs of other adults may be somewhat more difficult to ascertain, yet there are possible means of discovering them. The alert pastor who is a good listener and knows his congregation should know many of the needs of his people. Adults often express their needs and interests when given an opportunity to do so without narrow limits being drawn. Carrier refers to the case of a new teacher with a class of adults who, the teacher thought, ". . . had no questions to ask, but after being encouraged, they listed

twenty questions, from which a year's study was planned."²⁵ A pastor in a university city told a colleague of the writer's that people would not be interested in the documentary theory of the origin of the Pentateuch, but after the first meeting of an interdenominational study group on understanding and using the Bible, a university professor who was a member of this pastor's church expressed special appreciation for just such information, which was new to him. The writer, along with his wife, has had the experience of being requested by local churches to lead Bible study groups and by university professors and their wives to lead a Bible study and discussion group because these people felt the need for free-inquiry study and thinking in this area.

The need of the thoughtful adult for first-hand free-inquiry study of the Bible and Christian doctrine may be greater than we think. Eugene Carson Blake, Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. and recently president of the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A., is convinced that ". . . the prime and critical task before us is the winning back of intellectual leaders of our nation."²⁶ D. Campbell Wyckoff states that ". . . the Bible is primarily a book by and for adults" and that we should never regard the

²⁵Carrier, p. 132.

²⁶Eugene Carson Blake, "Strategies for Making Adequate Provision of Religious Education for All Our Young," Third Speech at the Third Assembly of the Golden Anniversary Convention of the Religious Education Association, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Penn., Nov. 8-10, 1953, Religious Education (Mar.-Apr., 1954), 100-101.

teaching of the Bible to children as enough because they are limited in their understanding by their lack of adult experience.²⁷ The adult needs to study the Bible in the light of adult experience and the full range of scholarly research, but the approach must be free and open if the thinking adult is to be interested and find much help.

Blake thinks part of the Church's difficulty in reaching the intellectuals is that "generally speaking the Christian churches in the United States have been anti-intellectual . . ."²⁸ He considers three streams of thought responsible for this anti-intellectualism: the effect of fundamentalist anti-intellectualism with its insistence on ". . . the verbal and literal interpretation of the Scriptures . . ." which impugned the human reason and resisted ". . . the modern empirical mood in favor of a rigid a priori strait jacket"; "sentimental liberal anti-intellectualism"; and neo-orthodoxy ". . . in so far as it has been based on the anti-intellectual tendencies that are so clearly a part of Kierkegaard, Barth, and even Brunner . . ."²⁹

Robert McAfee Brown, Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy of Religion at Union Theological Seminary in

²⁷Wyckoff, pp. 61-62.

²⁸Eugene Carson Blake, "Wanted Christian Scholars," The Student World, L (Third Quarter, 1957), 268-72. (This was an address given at the South-eastern States Faculty Conference, Montreat, North Carolina, Aug., 1956, and reprinted from The Christian Scholar, XXXIX (Dec., 1956), 260-65.)

²⁹Blake, The Student World, L (Third Quarter, 1957), 268-70.

New York, asks "why it is that American Eggheads find American Protestantism saying so little to them," and suspects ". . . that it is because the eggheads are clever enough to see how superficial much of the return to religion is."³⁰ Brown thinks Norman Vincent Peale's "turning religion into a device for getting what one wants, turning paryer into a gimmick for doubling incomes and getting rid of ulcers . . ." impress the "egghead" as ". . . both cheap and unconvincing."³¹ Further, Brown thinks the "egghead" notices how little difference being a church member makes to most church members. "But Billy Graham cannot make a real dent on the eggheads because he simply bypasses the intellectual problems connected with accepting the Christian faith."³² Therefore, ". . . eggheads equate Billy Graham with an outworn fundamentalism which cannot speak to them," which ". . . makes it impossible, on Billy Graham's terms, for them to love God with their minds . . ."³³ Brown also suggests, however, that there are pulpits and literature on Christianity which could speak to the "eggheads" if they would listen or read, but the fault may be partly theirs.³⁴ Nevertheless, we Christians have

³⁰Robert McAfee Brown, "The 'Egghead' in American Life," The Student World, L (Third Quarter, 1957), 254.

³¹Ibid., p. 255.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

the responsibility to meet the legitimate questions of the intellectuals with a free exchange of conviction and opinion in the light of the most demanding search for truth about life, the universe, and God. Any obscurantism immediately earns the intellectual's disrespect and blocks any help the offending person might otherwise bring. The intellectual needs the Christian Gospel as much as anyone, but obscurantist and naive interpretations of it will only stand in the way of his confrontation with the call of God in Christ to repentance, forgiveness, and a new life of love and service under God. If we are to help the thinking adults of today in their need for vital Christian faith, it must be with a nonauthoritarian approach which recognizes their right to use their God-given powers to think and evaluate the Christian claims for themselves. Each individual has the responsibility for his decisions and his life but we should not handicap him by dogmatism, unrealism, and obscurantism.

Then let us teach as interested leaders and helpers rather than as dispensers of authoritative dogma. Let us emphasize first-hand study rather than sectarian conclusions. Let us follow the learners to their problems and treat them with respect and understanding. And let us do the hard and searching study which stimulates our own religious growth and enables us to help the thinking and searching person at least to examine the Christian message in freedom and in the light of historical research and study.

CHAPTER XVI

A NONAUTHORITARIAN APPROACH TO TEACHING

The rationale for a nonauthoritarian approach to Christian education has already been stated repeatedly in this study.¹ The intention here is to discuss the practical problems and considerations in nonauthoritarian teaching of adolescents, college and university students, and adults. The term "nonauthoritarian" is chosen because authoritarian teaching can be done by liberals and humanists as well as by fundamentalists, conservatives, and the neo-orthodox. The need at the adolescent and adult level is for teaching which is nondirective rather than dogmatic and directive.

Because the adolescent or adult who is seriously religious has his basic orientation and integration of his life in his religion, he finds a basic security in his religion. New evidence or claims which challenge or suggest the possibility that a person's religion is based on weak or demonstrably false grounds naturally makes the person feel insecure. The older and more definite a person is in his

¹See above, pp. 217-62, 287-318.

religious convictions, the more likely he is to have trouble at this point when new and disturbing evidence comes to his attention. If a person feels his religious foundations beginning to crumble, he very naturally tends to become defensive and tends to try to strengthen the foundation. Often, in the attempt to maintain his basis of security, he reasserts emphatically that his religious position is sound. With these feelings and reactions the nonauthoritarian teacher should be sympathetic and understanding. It is no small matter for a person to face the haunting fear that his religious faith may be unjustified. Here the teacher who feels he must push a student to accept a particular conclusion on the meaning of some evidence may be doing irreparable harm. There is an emotional logic that needs to be respected as well as an intellectual logic. And the emotional logic is the need for a sound and stable interpretation of life which gives a person confidence and direction.

This need for security can be respected by leading the student gradually into the encounter with new evidence and counter claims, as well as evidence and claims with which he is already familiar. When a person faces new and disturbing evidence, he needs time to think it over without being called upon to accept it immediately. He needs time to weigh the evidence and make the necessary adjustments which make it possible to incorporate the new information

into his religious understanding. He needs the opportunity to see the possible good results and meaning indicated by the new evidence and the new conclusions which it justifies before he is asked to accept it. A good analogy could be the natural process by which children lose their baby teeth and grow their permanent teeth. The old teeth do not all fall out at once, but usually one by one, and then normally only when the new tooth is pushing from behind ready to replace the old tooth. It is true there is some inconvenience in the process and the child cannot bite or chew as well during the process, but he can still eat enough to be healthy and strong. It would not be sensible to knock out the old teeth till the new teeth are ready, nor to take them all out at once. Likewise, it is not desirable to confront a person with all the new evidence at once, perhaps destroying many or all of his religious supports and leaving him floundering. Rather, the person should have the opportunity to evaluate new evidence and digest new truth. When the new truth has been admitted and accepted, it will gradually push out the old view of truth much more efficiently than any direct attack could have done. In the process, the person's insecurity has been less marked and he is in an even better position to entertain more new evidence and truth. Also, the person has not run nearly as much danger of losing all his immature religious faith and perhaps never finding his way to a more mature faith.

This writer has seen this last happen to university students of a literalist and conservative background and knows how serious and lasting the bad effects can be. We should recognize each person's need to grow at his own rate and according to his own particular needs. We can help most if we are understanding and sympathetic rather than dogmatic and insistent.

Second, we must recognize a learner's need for first-hand study with good materials. Some study of the origins and contents of the Bible is good as an introduction to the Bible, but it is no substitute for first-hand study of the Bible and the confrontation with the problems of fair and honest interpretation. For instance, a person who is, or tends to be literalist in his approach to the Bible may very well simply reject as a matter of course, any suggestion or statement that the Bible is not verbally inspired and has some contradictory statements in it. To insist that it has contradictory statements in it only alienates the literalist and engenders his ill-will against anyone he thinks is trying to destroy faith in the Bible. But a person who has literalist leanings may react very differently if, rather than being attacked, he joins in a free-inquiry study of the Bible and sees for himself the two varying accounts of creation, the two varying and partially contradictory stories of the flood, and the varying accounts of the birth of Jesus. It is one thing for a person

to argue with another person about the Bible and whether it is verbally inspired; it is quite another thing for him to argue with the Bible itself when confronted with the first-hand internal evidence of contradictory statements within it. A colleague of the writer's saw significant growth in a student in just this way in a nonsectarian university class studying the Old Testament. The student was from a fundamentalist church, and was intelligent and willing at least to look at claimed evidence. The class had reached the Isaiah 7:14 passage after having considered the documentary theory of the origin of the Pentateuch and after having seen the need for seeking honestly the original meaning of the writer of any particular passage and the importance of considering the context of any saying in interpreting it. When the professor asked the students what the Isaiah 7:14 passage meant, the student from the fundamentalist church volunteered that he had always thought it referred to the birth of Christ, but that now he saw that it did not. If someone had told him this without the background information he had already learned in the course and assimilated, he would surely have rejected such a conclusion. But in the light of the new evidence and truth which he had accepted, he was then free to consider and accept more new truth. Without his first-hand study, such a conclusion concerning Isaiah 7:14 would have been anathema to him.

Third, study materials must be the best possible.

Materials which ignore the issues and attempt to do the thinking for the student are a hindrance rather than a help. The thoughtful student will want the best possible material available if he is really interested. When this writer first began teaching a university course in the life and teachings of Jesus, he searched for a book, or books, that was honest, fair, and thorough, and as nonsectarian as possible. Several of the students in his first class became so impressed by The Mission and Message of Jesus by Major, Manson, and Wright that they were dissatisfied with other books. As a result, this admirable book became the primary resource book in the course. The students were interested in using the best possible materials. They deserve study materials which state opposing points of view and discuss fairly the meaning and validity of them, as well as presenting the views of the author.

Fourth, suggested conclusions on controversial doctrinal questions should not be presented or considered before the questions have first been experienced and explored. It is unfair to a person to discuss possible conclusions on controversial questions before he has, through his study and experience, had a reasonable opportunity to understand the origin of the issue and the reasons for its importance. After people have become familiar with a problem and understand what is involved in it, they want to see possible

answers. Then they are much less likely to react purely emotionally and reject a conclusion which might be justified and understandable if seen in perspective. This caution is especially important because if a person feels his religious convictions threatened by suggested conclusions which seem to him destructive of his faith, he may reject the opportunity for study which could help him grow. This caution is also important in informal discussion and study groups where a person can so easily drop out and miss the perspective and experience necessary to understand why certain conclusions are suggested by scholars in the field. A person who believes in the Book of Revelation as a long-term prophecy might reject immediately the suggestion that it was written for the people living around 94 or 95 A.D. unless he had studied the book and noticed or had pointed out to him the many allusions to events, people, and places of that day, and statements of the nearness of the expected second coming of Christ. Without the background knowledge, the conclusion would be completely unacceptable, and understandably so. And let us not fall back on asking people to take our word for such things. This would be to substitute the authority of the teacher or the minister for the authority of the experience of the learner, and this way would lie training in authoritarianism rather than in Christian freedom.

Fifth, we must understand that change should come from within a person or an institution. This is implied in

some of the previous discussion but needs special emphasis. We cannot change people as such--we can only bring to their attention considerations and claims about evidence and its meaning which they may utilize in their thinking and choosing. When we try to do the thinking for other people, we only weaken them or offend them. Out of his considerable experience in the ecumenical movement and the World Council of Churches, Robert S. Bilheimer writes as follows:

. . . every point seems to indicate that change can come to the institution only from within. This is to say that, if a church is presented from the outside with a demand that it reform, the church will almost of necessity inevitably resist the demand. . . . On the other hand, if the element of change can be introduced as from within the institution, in its own terms and in reference to its own interests, it is possible for the change to become effective.²

Although Bilheimer is speaking in terms of institutions, he could just as well have spoken in terms of individuals, for it is the individuals that make up the institutions and who are identified with them and who do the reacting, not the institution as a third party. Bilheimer also applies to individuals this insight of the necessity of change coming from within when he describes some ecumenical meetings as follows:

Ecumenical discussions frequently convey the impression that people are there to defend positions, or heritages, or traditions, rather than to learn. one suspects that the Holy Spirit does not work most easily when a man is defending himself or his organization. One suspects that the Spirit moves

² Bilheimer, The Ecumenical Review, IV (July, 1952),

with a man when his defences are down, and he is in the humble mood of seeking greater knowledge from God and man.³

This is an excellent statement of the way people tend to react when pressured to change their views. It also underscores the validity of the study approach where people try to study or restudy together the areas of disagreement to try to come to a better understanding. Religious growth is positive change which is chosen by the individual concerned--it cannot be otherwise. Therefore, let us challenge and help people to take a fresh look at evidence and claims about evidence that they may gain the basis for intelligent evaluation and conservation of the truth that is in their heritage and for religious growth and positive change where necessary. Let us leave the person free to assimilate new truth in the confidence that he will accept it as soon as he can if he is sincere and is not put in the position where he feels he needs to save face by reasserting the supposed validity of the opinion which new evidence would refine or correct.

CHAPTER XVII

TEACHING WITH FREE INQUIRY

After having a basic understanding of the emotional factors discussed in the previous chapter we are ready to consider the factors which make nonsectarian free-inquiry teaching a great opportunity in Christian education. The first task with any study group or class is to structure the study situation so that there will be understanding and openness. The reasons for a free-inquiry, nonsectarian approach should be explained at least briefly with some illustrations of how refusal to consider claims of new evidence and truth have held back development in various fields. The cases of Copernicus and Columbus are good examples and others can be drawn from experience common to the members of the group. Those in a study group can be challenged to strict honesty and warned of the subtle dangers of dishonesty lurking in the temptation not to look at some claim or evidence because they fear it might say something they do not want it to say. Here an appeal to the faith that truth has nothing to fear from honest, fair, and full inquiry may be very helpful, and the question raised whether they would really want to fool themselves by refusing to look at all the available evidence and claims. It might also be suggested that a good scientist tests his theories and looks for possible contrary evidence

which would disprove his theories, and that we also should look for possible contrary evidence before coming to conclusions.

Second, those in a study group or class should also be cautioned against reacting too hard to claims that challenge something they believe and against accepting too easily some new claim about what is true. Rather, it should be suggested that each person should take time to weigh and evaluate the various claims and interpretations before coming to a definite conclusion. In planning a study outline or course, if possible, organize it so that the first encounter with information or claims to which those in the group or class may react negatively comes through reading or some source other than the teacher. This will protect the teacher from being included in any possible negative reactions and will also leave the learner emotionally free to talk a problem over with the teacher if he feels the need of talking to someone. It is also often helpful to students to suggest that some questions may need to be held open until new or additional evidence can be found, but that, in the meantime, the sensible thing to do is to continue living according to the best they already know. This helps prevent hasty judgments and makes the postponement of decision less painful; it also encourages stability and helps prevent the more extreme feelings of insecurity when it is recognized that in many activities and experiences in life, we cannot know for certain how things may work out, but we nevertheless try to do the best we can with what we have.

Third, encourage expressions of opinion and foster a spirit of respect for honest differences of opinion, even though each person has the responsibility to have as intelligent and informed opinions as possible. People can be encouraged to learn to disagree agreeably when they in all honesty must disagree. They can also be helped to see that by evaluating another's statements and views they may help another person see a mistake in his thinking or call attention to a basic consideration or piece of evidence that is being overlooked. In like manner, point out that by kindly challenging a statement by another person, the first person may have his own thinking tested in the process. Therefore, group discussion can be helpful to all people concerned. With this kind of orientation, study groups and classes, even of radically different backgrounds and belief, can learn to discuss controversial issues without becoming angry. Study groups and classes should be encouraged to discuss the controversial issues because, as they will easily understand, the issues that are controversial are the issues that make a major difference. To avoid or ignore these issues is to leave untouched the most vital issues and thus to be irrelevant to life in much of the discussion and teaching.

It can be suggested that we need to learn to discuss fairly the controversial issues, but should do so in a spirit of mutual respect and fairness. The writer vividly remembers the extreme hesitancy with which some religious emphasis week leaders at Montana State University agreed to take part in a

presentation in a joint meeting of Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant views on birth control. But the leaders conducted themselves as gentlemen and the many students who attended had the opportunity of hearing first-hand the various positions and reasons. They also had the opportunity to question the thinking of the leaders, and did so with polite but searching comments and questions. In a similar way, problems of inter-faith marriages can be discussed in joint meetings where the students can hear both sides of the controversial issue in the same meeting, thus preventing unfair representations of opposing points of view and at the same time overcoming the ignorance and self-righteousness which often comes from sectarian meetings on such subjects. With this approach, varying opinions on the Bible and Christian doctrine can also be considered to the benefit of all concerned.

Fourth, wherever feasible, lead people into first-hand experience of the problems concerned before the problems are discussed or possible conclusions considered. This prevents the unreality and impracticality of such teaching. It also prevents hasty rejection of possible conclusions before a person has some background and appreciation of his problem, as was pointed out in the last chapter.¹ This approach is also especially useful in helping people understand social problems. Actual association as equals with members of other races and nationalities is the best way to learn to love them and understand them.

¹Above, pp. 349-50.

Theories of possible solutions to the problem of racial prejudice can hardly be appreciated or discussed intelligently until people have seen enough of the problem first-hand to enable them to understand the problem, consider it realistically, and take practical steps toward a solution. Likewise, the effects of slums and alcoholism need to be seen to make discussion of the problems vital and realistically relevant.

The problem of Christian unity suffers from the same lack of first-hand experience. "The Report Message of the Southern California Study on 'The Nature of the Unity We Seek'" expresses it thus:

... much depends upon the elemental processes of bringing people together in primary relationships through which they can know each other, lose their sense of strangeness, come to trust each other, and so become willing to venture together upon the humble search for the larger spiritual context we have seen lacking for our conversations on faith and order. No matter what excellent patterns of organic unity we may devise, nor how devoutly we conceive them to rest upon Biblical grounds or upon an historical consensus concerning the will of God, they will be useless unless in them both our members and our church leaders meet as person to person bound together by common loyalties, responsibilities, and hopes.²

As a child's religious understanding is limited by his experience, so is that of adolescents and adults. Let us provide and utilize the necessary opportunities for helping

²Southern California Council of Churches, "The Report Message on 'The Nature of the Unity We Seek,' A study project of the Southern California Council of Churches, July 19, 1957," p. 4. (mimeographed.) (The writer is indebted to Dr. Forrest C. Blair, Executive Director of the Church Federation of Los Angeles, Calif., for a copy of this Report.)

people see and experience, if possible, the problems to be studied so that our teaching will be relevant and understandable.

Fifth, we must use language that is understood.

This may require the gradual building of vocabulary on the part of the people in the study group or class, but we have no other good means for communicating our thinking. In speaking of recent experiences in religious work among intellectuals in Germany, Hanns Lilje, Bishop of Hanover and Vice-Chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, states that the intellectual class is ". . . suspicious of every word of the common theological language," and that this ". . . is not because of opposition, but because of inability to understand what is meant."³ Enrik Ingelstan, Professor of Physics at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden, calls attention to the fact that theological language is not understood and that the use of it may prevent religious communication. He writes:

I can give direct examples of how such central Christian concepts as sin and grace, guilt and responsibility, go well home in the minds of students of science or medicine when once translated into the language they understand. Many are aware of the emptiness and lack of standards in a world motivated by futile things like a desire for increased material well-being and variation of physical sensations. This awareness, together with much seeking and sense of failure, open the mind to understanding of Christian values and to the idea of a Christian order, even if this is imparted in an extremely direct and exigent

³Hanns Lilje, "Opening Doors in the Intellectual World," The Ecumenical Review, I (Summer, 1949), 401.

form. But if instead we use the language of theological debate, speaking of the Fall from Grace, heaven and hell, then we close the doors before communication can be established.⁴

European students and adults are not unique in this regard. In the teaching work of the writer and his wife in the affiliated School of Religion at Montana State University, some students had so little background in religion and were so handicapped in classes because of lack of vocabulary, as well as other religious background, that they asked for an introductory course which would help them before they enrolled in other courses in Bible and religion. If we are going to communicate with people, we must start with the language they understand.

But the language people understand may present other difficulties for the teacher. Depending upon the religious backgrounds of people, there are some words or phrases that might be called "scare words"--they are so loaded with connotations or misinterpretations that they must either be avoided at first, or carefully defined. The term "Biblical criticism" may be very suggestive to some people that someone is destructive in his attitude toward the Bible. Criticism may be redefined, but the adverse connotations that have become associated with it tend to cling to it. The term "myth" is also a word that is not understood in its technical meaning by the common person or by students without some background. For many people, myth means the same thing as fairy tale,

⁴Enrik Ingelstan, "Contemporary Science and Human Life," The Ecumenical Review, IX (July, 1957), 377.

and woe be unto any teacher who, in the presence of a person of literalist or conservative leanings, refers to anything in the Bible as myth. A teacher needs to be careful that he is both understood and not misunderstood. He often has no opportunity to correct a misunderstanding if there is one, and may have lost contact with a person who otherwise might have been enriched by the study. For these reasons people should not be allowed to come into a study group after the group is well started--if they miss the background information and experience, they may easily misunderstand later discussion.

The telling of anecdotes pointed at religious groups and ideas is also a very dubious indulgence. It tends to engender in the hearers a callous attitude toward the religious group which appears in an unfavorable light in the anecdote if the hearers are not members of that group. But a person who is a member of the religious group which appears in an unfavorable light in the anecdote is likely to be offended and lose respect for the teacher. Also, the teacher's reputation for fairness will be compromised. The teacher is then likely to lose empathetic contact with those in the group, especially those who may feel offended, and communication ceases between them, thus preventing any vital learning experience. Laughing at ourselves is often a saving factor; laughing at the religious beliefs of others tends to become pride and condescension.

Sixth, it is important to help students learn to evaluate evidence, and claims about the meaning of evidence.

Many people have never had any training in doing this, especially in relation to the Bible and religion. They need to learn to evaluate the meaning and validity of a claim of evidence or about evidence so they can learn to think responsibly in regard to religion. Often it is best to deal with ideas and claims about evidence without identifying who holds the idea or makes the claim, because we tend to give undue credence to the ideas and claims of those we like and we tend to reject the ideas and claims of those we dislike. Therefore, if a claim or idea is first discussed and evaluated on its own merits, the learners will be more likely to take a fair look at it rather than being conditioned by their attitudes toward the one or group who holds or champions a certain position. For the same reason, it may be desirable for a teacher not to state his conclusion on an issue until after those in the group or class have considered the issue. All of this does not mean that the individuals and groups who hold or champion certain positions and claims should never be identified, but it does mean to suggest that it is often desirable to protect the learner from emotional coloring of his consideration of an issue by his attitude toward a person or a group. In a local church teaching situation, there is much more place for the personal witness of the teacher to his faith, but it is best that this come after the initial consideration of the evidence and the claims concerning a particular issue. On some issues, however, it is especially necessary that the holders of certain positions and beliefs be identified.

This is especially true of attitudes toward interfaith marriages and the authority of the Bishop of Rome, for knowing what the distinctive beliefs and claims of a person or a group are helps one to view additional claims and actions by those people or groups with perspective. This is not necessarily prejudice for there is a very great difference between prejudice and an informed and considered opinion.

Seventh, it is important that a teacher be positive rather than negative in his basic attitudes and that he not be dogmatic or argumentative. The positive attitude and spirit does not scare the insecure person and lets the learner grow at his own speed. Whenever a person becomes argumentative, he has become a protagonist rather than a teacher. Then he begins to try to convince someone of a point rather than offering a consideration that may be important or may have been overlooked. We must always recognize the student's right to ask and investigate any question and to come to his own honest conclusion after having done so. This recognizes the possibility that a person may come to a negative decision, but we must run the risk because the opportunity of freedom is necessary for spiritual growth. A person's primary responsibility and relationship is to God, not to any teacher. Also, a person who makes a negative decision at one point, if still treated with understanding freedom, fairness, and respect, may find it easier to reverse his decision later in the light of new evidence and experience. There are many outstanding

religious leaders who have gone through such a period.

Eighth, nonauthoritarian teaching requires that there be adequate opportunity for discussion in which the members of a group or class can phrase their thinking and exchange ideas. They also need the opportunity to ask questions to clear up details and possible points of misunderstanding. However, a caution needs to be expressed concerning a teacher's replying to questions. The teacher should be careful not to answer a question directly and concisely unless the members of the group, or, if in private, the person, has the background to put an answer in perspective and not misunderstand it. For this reason it may sometimes be desirable to suggest that consideration of answers to a question should be postponed until the whole subject can be considered in context and in the light of other relevant information and considerations. If it is deemed best to attempt to answer the question at the time, as is sometimes necessary, especially if there is a challenge in the question and postponing an answer to it would be interpreted as dodging the question, the teacher should be careful to sketch in the background so the questioner, and others who might be listening, will be able to see the answer in perspective. It is also sometimes helpful to talk about the question and the various factors and complications involved in any attempted answer. If one is being tested by a question, it is sometimes very helpful first to discuss the question to put it in perspective, and then ask a counter question which both takes the attention off the

teacher and faces the questioner with a relevant and pertinent question which he is either not prepared to answer, or in the answering of which he also answers his first question which was directed at the teacher. Jesus did exactly this type of thing when he was asked whether the Jews should pay taxes to the Romans,⁵ when he was asked by what authority he cleansed the temple in Jerusalem,⁶ and when a man asked who his neighbor was whom he should love.⁷ There may be some situations, too, where the most effective teaching technique is to ask a question which requires the questioner to consider the point at issue from another perspective and in the light of new information or information that is being overlooked.

A further caution should be expressed against a teacher's challenging points of view or opinions expressed by others when there is insufficient time or the situation does not allow consideration of the question with sufficient fullness and background to be able to come to the consideration of possible conclusions. The young minister or teacher full of his recently acquired knowledge may be entirely too eager to set people right in their thinking, and, lacking patience and training, may precipitate discussions at inopportune

⁵Mk. 12:13-17; Matt. 22:15-22; Lk. 20:20-26.

⁶Mk. 11:27-33; Matt. 21:23-27; Lk. 20:1-8.

⁷Lk. 10:25-37.

times or on subjects that have many more ramifications than he realized. But with patience, humility, and a nonauthoritarian approach, a young minister can grow with his people and gradually lead them into fuller Christian understanding and living.

In this discussion of nonauthoritarian teaching with free inquiry, the intention has been to point out some of the practical problems that are often met in teaching in the areas of the Bible, church history, and doctrine, and to suggest cautions and considerations which should help a teacher or minister do the kind of teaching that will help a person work through some of the problems and questions which may confront a sincere and intelligent person as he faces life and the need for a religion which is intellectually respectable and true to experience. Let us always bear in mind that the learners will lead us to their problems and questions and make it possible for us to help them solve and answer them if we will be patient, considerate, fair, and honest with them. Special attention has been given to the problems of teaching people who have a somewhat conservative or literalist attitude in religion because in the writer's experience and in conversation with many ministers he has found that people with somewhat conservative or literalist attitudes are a major group in many of our churches and the ones most likely to cause difficulty if they are not helped to work through their problems and questions by a sympathetic and understanding teacher. These people must be helped, both for their own religious life and

growth and for the added service they can then render to the work of the church. This will also help the more intellectual person to see the validity and truth of Christianity without as much danger of being alienated by views of the Bible and Christianity which are completely unacceptable to him in the light of present-day knowledge and understanding.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MINISTER AND NONAUTHORITARIAN
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The purpose of this study of authority and freedom in the Protestant churches in America today has been to seek an understanding of the nature of authority and freedom in Christianity, to evaluate the validity of the various claims for final authority, to ascertain the issues and requirements for Christian education in the light of what the study indicates is the functioning authority, and to suggest the principles and practical considerations which will help provide the kind of Christian education needed for adolescents and adults in our day.

The question of the authority of the ministry has already been discussed¹ and its relative nature indicated. The authority of the minister is that of a witness which must be subject to the acceptance or rejection by other individuals as each evaluates the validity of the preaching and teaching of the minister. Certainly the practical authority of the minister of a local church is great. He is usually the best informed person in his local church concerning the Bible, church history, and Christian faith and doctrine. But the problem to be considered here is the

¹Above, pp. 181-92.

Christian education program of the church and the relation of the minister to it.

The Teaching Function of the Church

The view of Christian education envisaged here includes the total work of the church. Life itself is a continuing educational experience, although many may refuse to learn their lessons. In The Advancement of Theological Education the view is stated that "everything in the life of the church and work of the pastor may involve teaching, and have an educational aspect."² The authors speak of their ". . . judgment, which is shared by many in the field, that the establishment of the concept of the teaching function of the church and of the pastor is of basic importance and has been largely accomplished with the help of religious educators."³ In their opinion, "the minister needs to relate the content of Christian faith to the processes of human growth, and to see his church as a teaching community."⁴ A church should be a witnessing and a nurturing community. But even its witnessing is a form of teaching--a form of communicating the beliefs and concerns of its members to others. But at the same time the members of a church continue to communicate their understandings and problems to other members of the Christian community. The pastor or minister of a church teaches when he preaches. His

²Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson, p. 105.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

task is to help the congregation to a better understanding and appropriation of the Christian faith. He tries to help his people learn the Christian truths about God, man, and life, and how to grow into more mature Christian persons who can love and serve God and their fellowmen. The counseling work of the minister is also a part of Christian education, for here the central purpose is to help the counselee learn to live as a Christian. Christian education is essentially communicating the Christian faith, and everything a church does to communicate its faith is part of Christian education.

The Attitudes of the Minister

The attitudes of the minister are of cardinal importance for the total educational program of the church. Wesner Fallaw, Howard Professor of Religious Education at Andover Newton Theological School, thinks that the ministers are ". . . the key to educational progress in the churches,"⁵ and hopes that there will be more pastors who are "both teachers and preachers."⁶ Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson recognize that ". . . the large majority of Christian pastors must be their own directors of religious education in their churches . . ."⁷ This writer would add that even in a church

⁵Wesner Fallaw, "Trends in Protestant Religious Education," Part I of "Trends in Religious Education, a Symposium," Religious Education, XLVIII (Jan.-Feb., 1953), 12.

⁶Ibid., p. 8.

⁷Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson, p. 106.

which employs a director of Christian education, or a minister of education, the senior minister is still the primary leader of the congregation and as such wields great influence over the total Christian education program of the church. For this reason, the attitudes of the minister are extremely important.

The minister of a church is in one of the most tempting yet strategic positions anyone could attempt to fill. If he is a sincere, personable, and reasonably able person, he is likely to be respected and liked by the congregation especially if he does not offend some of the congregation with incisive preaching and teaching which they reject. As has been mentioned before, there is a tendency to "take our authorities whole,"⁸ and when the minister is liked, his religious opinions and judgments are likely to be accepted as authoritative. Certainly the minister should be able to speak with authority--the authority of experience, including his study and his own personal religious life. But there is always the temptation to enjoy position and to become careless in reasoning when one's opinions are not questioned and subjected to critical evaluation. Thus the minister can easily change from being authoritative to being authoritarian where he feels his opinions should not be questioned but accepted because they are his. Unfortunately, there are many people who seem to want to escape their own responsibility for thinking and will gladly

⁸Above, pp. 51-52.

accept someone else's opinions. This develops the dependent personality which is soon without the basis for thinking critically on any important issue. Then people begin to quote authorities, as did the Scribes and Pharisees, rather than speaking with authority as Jesus did--the authority of individual experience and understanding which cannot be given direct to anyone else, but can only be gained by experience and reflection. The minister has the responsibility to help prevent the type of personal attachment which weakens rather than strengthens an individual's own religious growth. Like Peter, a minister may need to say to an adoring parishioner, "stand up; I too am a man."⁹

The attitudes of the minister are likely to set the tone of the whole Christian education program of a church. If there is a director or minister of Christian education, the minister probably has a great influence over the choice of this person, and probably will favor a person with views at least similar to his. Therefore, if the minister is authoritarian and dogmatic, the director or minister of Christian education that is chosen will probably be this type of person, or else one who is submissive and allows the minister to play an authoritarian role. Or the minister may go to the other extreme and undercut the importance of the direct teaching work of the church by leaving it all to a director or minister of Christian education. In this case

⁹Acts 10:25-26.

he would not develop the team approach and spirit which develops a coordinated program and undergirds the work of the Christian education department, and especially the Sunday School. Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson report they "... found a fairly widespread feeling among religious educators that ministers do not give enough attention to this part of their church program; some spoke emphatically about ministerial indifference to the church school."¹⁰ These authors also quote Wesner Fallaw's estimate "... based on some years of observing youth leaders who are seminary students, that 50 to 75 per cent of our future pastors are headed for maintaining the existing void between youth and ministers."¹¹ But it is also pointed out that there are a number of capable ministers "... who are building strong congregations and who show a special interest in the educational responsibility of the church."¹² Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson also note that "a number of these very busy ministers take time to do some teaching in their church schools," and comment that "perhaps one mark of effective ministry is the taking responsibility for Christian nurture of all ages."¹³ This

¹⁰Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson, p. 104.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 104-105, quoting Wesner Fallaw, "Where Are the Pastors of Youth?" The Christian Century, LXI (Oct. 6, 1954), 1201.

¹²Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson, p. 105.

¹³Ibid.

active interest of the minister in the direct teaching work of the church is extremely important, for this work needs his counsel, encouragement, and support.

If the minister of a church functions as the director of Christian education of that church, his attitudes are equally or more important than if he does not. As he works with the teachers and perhaps as he teaches a Sunday School class or a study group himself, his approach is extremely important. If his approach is authoritarian, he will tend to make others that way in turn, or will offend them and eventually be unable to communicate with them. The attitude and approach of the minister toward the youth of the church is of special importance because it is at the age of adolescence especially that the youth begin asserting their own independence and begin questioning and evaluating the authority and the validity of the opinions of their teachers. It will be the more alert and courageous young people that will take the lead in this. If the minister is authoritarian and unsympathetic to the needs and questionings of the adolescents, they may feel the need to reject both him and the religion he stands for. Thus, it is especially important that the minister be understanding of the needs of adolescents and that he allow them their freedom to take the responsibility for their own thoughts and lives. The minister is most likely to be the best informed person in the very areas in religion where adolescents ask their searching questions. Therefore, it is especially important that the minister understand the

adolescents and that he be in a position to help them in their attempts to evaluate the validity of their religious inheritance and experiences. For this reason, a non-authoritarian attitude and approach by the minister is extremely important. This does not mean that he cannot be positive in his counsel and counseling and present the challenge of the Christian Gospel in very definite terms, but it does mean that the adolescent needs to be helped to grow and mature in his own right rather than constrained to conform to a predetermined mold.

Ministers and Lay Leadership

Visser 't Hooft's statement that "' . . . in so far as we are slaves and spokesmen, the minister has the same authority as Christ'"¹⁴ dramatizes the problem of the relationship of a minister to a congregation. The authoritarian attitude suggested by such a statement would lead very naturally to a conception of the minister as the rightful authority in a church, and as the commanding officer taking orders from the commander-in-chief. But we have already pointed out that any such authoritarian view of the role of the minister is alien to the teachings of Jesus regarding the nature of God and His will.¹⁵ and denies the freedom which God has given to each individual

¹⁴Visser 't Hooft, Time, LXX (Sept. 9, 1957), 62.

¹⁵Above, pp. 73-75.

man to be responsible for his own life, and whether he will respond in love to the opportunity of life in the image of God.

Frank W. Herriott, in an address to the graduating class of Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 1950, spoke of the "true ministry" as ". . . the ministry of the humble servant, not that of the superior master."¹⁶ He outlines the short step from wishing ". . . to serve people to the determination to dominate them," partly because we think that "we have the answers to life's profound questions . . ." and, therefore, ". . . will dominate people--for their own good," perhaps by manipulating them "carefully and tactfully."¹⁷ Herriott asserts that this temptation to dominate people ". . . must be resisted," and calls attention to the finite limitations of ministers--limitations of knowledge and power. He asserts that "the life of the spirit is beyond our control," and that if an individual ". . . is to become a real person, if he is to develop his true stature as a child of God, we dare not manipulate him."¹⁸ We must resist the temptation to try

¹⁶Frank W. Herriott, "An Educational Approach to the Practice of the Ministry," An Address to the Graduating Class of Union Theological Seminary, May 23, 1950, Religious Education, XLV (July-Aug., 1950), 217. (Herriott is Professor of Religious Education at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.)

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 217, 219.

to manipulate people because ". . . domination defeats the very purposes we have at heart."¹⁹ Herriott continues in the following incisive and penetrating words:

The focus of significance is not on the activity of the minister, but on the activity within the parishioner. The critical and essential elements are his purpose, not our purposes for him; his interests and concerns, not the interests and concerns we prescribe for him. We cannot give him the attitudes we wish he had; we cannot give him a religious faith. We all recognize this, but it is a hard fact to accept; especially difficult for the minister, both because of the depth of his passion for souls and because of the aggressive leadership role--at times the "prima donna" role--which the church and its tradition seems to set for him. We are really to be servants and not masters. Not only the activity must be within, but the control must be there. If he is to be a person, this individual must maintain that inner citadel of integrity, and we dare not enter, either by force or by stealth, to enforce our will. In this area, we are not to command or to be clever in manipulation. If any man does succeed in entering and in taking control, God have mercy upon him--for he has quenched a living spirit!²⁰

With this excellent statement of the responsibility of the minister and the limitations of his power and authority this writer agrees wholeheartedly; it could hardly be stated better. But there are far-reaching implications for this nonauthoritarian approach in working with the lay leaders of a church.

In an excellent article entitled "Administering the Church by Staff-Congregation Dynamics," Wilson F. Wetzler, Director of Teacher Training in Queens College,

¹⁹Ibid., p. 219.

²⁰Ibid.

Charlotte, North Carolina, draws heavily from an article in the field of industrial management from which he thinks "definite implications for religious organizations can be made."²¹ In pointing out these implications, Wetzler states that "the key words . . . are 'working with,'" and describes "the psychological or democratic way of leadership" as "characterized principally by the manner in which decisions are made," that is, "the group participates in the making of certain decisions, and especially in those areas directly affecting them."²² He states further:

. . . the psychological approach by the church administration means: Group concurrence on decisions, recognition of the problems and feelings of individuals as they participate in decision making, and concern with the social climate that exists for the total group. Important, too, are the methods used by the minister, staff, and the congregation in reaching solutions to problems.

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In summary, when the staff is allowed group participation in the making of decisions and when there is a flexibility in the communicating of decisions, there is a degree of motivation that will contribute to better teaching in the church, more personal satisfactions, and even more "production" by church members as a whole.

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Discipline, motivation, and the control of people should be based on psychological principles. The group-centered administrator knows that organized behavior must be goal seeking behavior. He is a successful church executive when he has helped every member to be concerned with the achievement of goals.

²¹Wilson F. Wetzler, "Administering the Church by Staff-Congregation Dynamics," Religious Education, XLIX (July-Aug., 1954), 291, citing Roger M. Bellows, "Employee Dynamics and Engineering Technology," Advanced Management, XVII (Nov., 1952), 11.

²²Ibid.

Everyone not only knows what to do, but their interests, attitudes, and feelings have entered into the picture as well. The goals of the minister and total group now become common goals that have been cooperatively set up and are now mutually sought after.²³

Wetzler lists six recommendations for democratic leadership within the churches which state concisely and explicitly a psychologically sound and nonauthoritarian approach to church leadership.²⁴ These insights are not new and have been used effectively for many years, especially in the work of the student Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A.; nevertheless, Wetzler's statement of them is excellent and concise.

However, there is a caution that should be expressed. We should keep constantly in mind that the utilization of these principles should never be allowed to lead to attitudes of superiority and manipulation.

²³Ibid., pp. 291-92.

²⁴The recommendations read as follows: "1. Church administrators must consider the needs and feelings of the group by adopting the 'we' approach that takes into account the social climate of the group. 2. In areas affecting the group there should be participation in decision making, concurrence on decisions, and a flexibility in communicating decisions. 3. Motivation coming from top levels is to be centered in working with people in the process of getting them to do things and not in telling or ordering them. 4. The attitude of the religious administrator is to be that of a group-minded person who will get work done primarily because of his genuine interest in the total welfare of his co-workers. 5. The group will seek to achieve goals that have been cooperatively developed with the executive body of the church. 6. The principal role of the church leader will be that of participating as a member of the 'in' group. He does not sacrifice leadership and know-how, but he uses those leader-skills that depend on the psychological form of motivation." Ibid., p. 293.

Wetzler uses the term manipulation once in his discussion,²⁵ but apparently not in the sense of influencing people to do what they would not want to do in the light of all available evidence. We must never take advantage of the knowledge of the motivations and weaknesses of people to get them to do what we think best. Rather, the principle is to make it possible for others to see, share, and determine the goals. Instead of speaking of the minister as the church executive or church administrator, it might be better to speak of him as the captain of the team. But the purpose is the same--to share with the people of a congregation and its lay leaders the concerns and visions and problems, and to arrive at decisions together after full consideration by all concerned. This is not manipulation but simply responsible democratic leadership. In the process, leadership potential is developed in the lay people and the plans and goals are their plans and goals. Of course, the minister is a key person, but in many ways he serves as a resource person and an able counselor as well as fellow laborer.

The strongest possible leadership is exercised by the minister who earns the respect of his parishioners by his fairness, balanced judgment, vision, and good will as he and the people of the congregation plan, worship, and work together. There may be some dangers in group dynamics where there is inadequate leadership and resourcefulness on

²⁵Ibid.

the part of the minister and members of a group, but centering the responsibility for decision and planning in a poorly qualified minister in an authoritarian way would have more dangers. The benefit of the considered judgment of at least several people would be lost and the minister and the people of the congregation would tend to grow apart.²⁶ The minister has a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to think with his people rather than to try to think for them, and in the process they will grow and can take more leadership responsibility. Sometimes this is hard to understand or appreciate; there may be apprehension that something will not be done the best possible and, therefore, people sometimes do not get the opportunity to grow into responsible leaders. The writer remembers vividly one student who had organized a series of programs for a voluntary religious association of which he was a member. The following year this student was afraid for anyone else to be given the responsibility for organizing another series of similar meetings lest the meetings not be well organized and conducted because the other

²⁶Religious Education, XLVI (Nov.-Dec., 1951), contains four articles dealing with group dynamics, one of which is highly critical and seriously questions many of the supposed techniques of group dynamics. See Robert Gray Gunderson, "Dangers in Group Dynamics," Religious Education, XLVI (Nov.-Dec., 1951), 342-344. Other articles in the same issue dealing with group dynamics include: "Group Dynamics in the Life of the Church," by Ross Snyder; "The Group in Christian Education," by Harry De Wire; and "Developing the Neighborhood Group," by Wesner Fallaw.

available students who might be asked to organize such meetings had not had any experience doing it. Another student kindly remarked, "But look, Bert, you hadn't had any experience either before you did it. And someone else can learn, too, if he has the opportunity."

Leaders are developed both by training and carrying leadership responsibilities, but without the opportunity to serve in some leadership position, lay leaders are not developed. Murray expresses it very succinctly when he remarks that "when in a church we hear someone praised for having held a particular office for fifty years, we seldom think of those who might have held it but will now never have the chance."²⁷ He points out that when such a thing has happened, "a whole generation has missed out" because of ". . . a refusal of age to be adventurous and to let go the seals of authority into younger hands."²⁸ He thinks that this refusal to believe that ". . . younger people could do the work is the very negation of the Christian spirit . . ." and that ". . . because of such disbelief a church has often sunk into a purely secular type of society, in which none of the conditions in which alone Christ can be made known to men has been fulfilled."²⁹ As a result, people are alienated and depart from the church while those left in the church

²⁷ Murray, p. 193.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

substitute a ". . . more and more rigid orthodoxy for a warm-hearted and adventurous loyalty."³⁰ Murray concludes that "a more thorough system of religious education will require that the teachers and officials of such education shall exhibit at least as much of the spirit of self-sacrifice as they require of their pupils."³¹ It is the minister's responsibility to try to help others develop into the more mature Christians who can fill leadership positions and in turn help others grow in like manner. This would go far toward meeting the shortage of available people to fill responsible positions in many of our churches, and would encourage the Christian development of the free spiritual person who can serve as a leader and render significant service as a mature and responsible person in a democratic church and society.

The Training of Ministers

Perhaps the most crucial problem in the provision of nonauthoritarian Christian education is the training and educating of ministers who are nonauthoritarian. But this, in turn, is closely related to the approach to teaching and education that we find in our theological schools. The need is well stated in The Advancement of Theological Education in the following reference to

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

. . . the difficulty of so mediating a heritage of knowledge and so using a tradition that the powers of the living present be not choked or thwarted but released and directed so that a living generation become not the slave but the heir, conservator, and perfecter of its ancestors. Also recurrent and constant in education are the difficulties of finding the unity of wisdom in the multiplicity of knowledge, and of fostering the integrity of the self while its manifold needs are being met.³²

Nevin C. Harner, Professor of Christian Education at the Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, asserts that ". . . there is no such thing in a seminary as good teaching of biblical, historical, or theological content without regard to the way in which such content is to be used in the actual ministry" because ". . . each of us tends to use knowledge in a way conditioned largely by the form and manner in which the knowledge first came to us."³³ He suggests that ". . . the cultivation of a Protestant constituency which is fully literate theologically, historically, biblically, and ethically will be set forward in proportion as we achieve in our seminaries such a handling of content subjects as will be truly scholarly but never unmindful of the service such content is to perform in preaching, teaching, and the care of individual souls."³⁴ Harner suggests further that there is ". . . no

³²Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson, p. 202.

³³Nevin C. Harner, "The Reintegration of Christian Education within the Christian Community and its Relevance for Theological Education," Religious Education, XLV (July-Aug., 1950), 227.

³⁴Ibid., p. 228.

such thing as a contentless methodology" and that "the guidance of children, youth, and adults cannot be adequately considered in isolation from the Bible, the history of the Church, and the verities of Christian faith, for the very good reason that Christian growth . . . takes place in . . . vital relation to God and Christ and the Church and the world."³⁵ If true, this underscores the need for non-authoritarian teaching in our seminaries, and for the kind of experience for seminary students which will help them be nonauthoritarian in spirit and fact. Here the confessionally oriented seminary may be a source of difficulty. This question is faced frankly in The Advancement of Theological Education where it is stated that, although the surveyors did not find in many schools the extreme dogmatism which attempts to hand down "a creedal or confessional position" transmitted as a tradition ". . . without too much critical examination," they did ". . . find in many confessionally oriented schools . . . that acceptance of tradition has created a climate in which the stimulus of tension with other viewpoints is absent."³⁶ The conservative control factor in canonical and ordination examinations are also noted with the pertinent comment that "if examiners show that they are more concerned with theological honesty and maturity than with rote learning the schools will be more free to develop

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson, p. 136.

significant courses, and to teach with greater effectiveness."³⁷ If we are to develop nonauthoritarian ministers and leaders, our seminaries must be nonauthoritarian. Then should our seminaries be interdenominational?

Robert Francis Johnson, now a professor at the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest, asked an Interseminary Movement meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio, the following question: "In the light of the ecumenical movement, is there any justification for a purely denominational faculty . . ." and "should we attempt to draw into our student bodies those who do not belong to the predominant denomination maintaining the seminary?"³⁸ Johnson also asked how the curriculum would be affected by an ecumenical basis and "how far . . . a denominational seminary [should] attempt to be ahead of our somewhat introverted congregations."³⁹ Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson express the opinion that ". . . the establishment of the ecumenical context for theological education provides one of the conditions for a more vigorous challenge to the student's thinking."⁴⁰ They recognize it is difficult ". . . to create this context in which many Christian traditions are set in relation to one another and at the same time to

³⁷ Ibid., p. 137.

³⁸ Robert Francis Johnson, quoted by Hyslop, et al., p. 10.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁴⁰ Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson, p. 136.

achieve the full impact of one tradition," but suggests that ". . . unwillingness to accept the tensions involved in relating a church tradition to the ecumenical scene would seem to be one of the factors which makes theological education more rigid than it ought to be."⁴¹ This writer would add that unless some of this rigidity, which is actually authoritarianism, is removed we will not develop the type of nonauthoritarian leadership which is needed in our Protestant churches. Furthermore, "the full impact of one tradition" should not be considered the primary goal in theological education, but the opportunity for the full impact of the Christian Gospel with freedom and power. This is especially important because of the relative nature of all statements of the Christian tradition, and the necessity for freedom of thought and inquiry for the continuing search for fuller understanding of life, God, and His will.

The problem of indoctrination has been discussed previously,⁴² but the need of a broader approach to questions of Christian doctrine and church history should be called to mind again here. The Southern California Council of Churches' study group on "The Nature of the Unity We Seek" suggests that "the teaching of Church history in seminaries and the story of the Church given in denominational curriculum materials need to be re-examined in the interests of

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Above, pp. 288-99.

objectivity and wholeness."⁴³ The members of this study group express their opinion that "too often in both these points of decisive education, attention to the whole Church is but prologue for a full account of the denomination."⁴⁴ Albert Outler also calls attention to this problem by saying that "it is notorious that the traditional patterns of church history and the history of doctrine have been more apologetic and partisan than synoptic and ecumenical."⁴⁵ He suggests that ". . . it is well-nigh impossible for a student, in the present state of historical scholarship, to get an ecumenical view of the long and confused pilgrimage of the people of God as it has unfolded in time and expanded in space."⁴⁶ If we are to train ministers and directors of Christian education for mature, nonauthoritarian, and democratic leadership, and provide the curriculum for the nonsectarian study and understanding of Church history and doctrine, we must broaden the base of study in our theological schools and leave the professors and students free for the honest search for truth. The fact that about half of the doctors degrees are granted by denominational institutions and the other half mostly by interdenominational institutions may be a good sign.⁴⁷ There

⁴³Southern California Council of Churches, "The Report Message on 'The Nature of the Unity We Seek,'" p. 6.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Outler, The Ecumenical Review, V (Oct., 1952), 60.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 60-61.

⁴⁷Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson, p. 18.

may also be hope in the growth of the demand for higher educational standards for the young people and ministers of the conservative groups, especially if this education includes consideration of other points of view and uses scholarly materials that cross denominational and liberal-conservative lines.⁴⁸

Ministers and the Bible

For many ministers the Bible is still a problem.

It may not be as much a personal problem for them as it was when Harry Emerson Fosdick gave his famous Lyman Beecher Lectures in 1924 on "The Modern Use of the Bible,"⁴⁹ except perhaps in some of the relatively conservative theological schools. But the problem of the Bible as faced by the nonauthoritarian minister and director of Christian education today is a combination of two questions: what is the nature of the inspiration and authority of the Bible? and, how can the results of Biblical scholarship and the refined understanding of the Bible and its message be made available to the rank and file of the people in our churches and those who are on the fringes, perhaps because they have unsolved questions about the Bible? The first of these questions and the problem of the minister's own Biblical education and training will be discussed briefly here; the problem of helping the average person to understand

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 5, 162

⁴⁹Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Modern Use of the Bible (New York: Association Press, 1924), pp. 1-3.

and use the Bible will be the concern of the next chapter.

It is significant that the program of Ministers' Week in January, 1957 at Chicago Theological Seminary was "... dedicated to the role of the Bible in the life and witness of the Church."⁵⁰ J. Coert Rylaarsdam, Professor of Old Testament Theology in the Federated Theological Faculty related to the University of Chicago, and Chairman of the Biblical Field and a member of the Chicago Theological Seminary Administrative Council, speaks of "... the insistent, if not always articulate awareness of the churches today that their witness, in worship and in doctrine, must be an expression of the biblical message."⁵¹ The intent of the program of this Ministers' Week was "... to provide relevant expositions of this ..." Biblical message in order to meet "the real needs of the clergy."⁵² Rylaarsdam thinks that "... it is in the actual delineation of the message of the Bible in relation to the spiritual issues of our time that the recovery of the Bible as an available primary and critical resource usable as such by ministers themselves is most likely to take place."⁵³ This is certainly tacit recognition that some ministers have not been

⁵⁰ J. Coert Rylaarsdam, "The Recovery of the Bible," The Chicago Theological Seminary Register, XLVI (Nov., 1956), p. 1. (The article does not state directly but seems to imply this "Ministers' Week" is a project of Chicago Theological Seminary rather than of the four theological schools cooperating in the Federated Theological Faculty.)

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

using the Bible in this way. A little later Rylaarsdam states that "thoughtful Christian ministers . . . are frustrated when they attempt to use the Bible as the primary resource for their preaching or theological thinking."⁵⁴ Part of this difficulty is the problem of being misunderstood so easily by the laity because of their lack of information and understanding. But part of the problem is also that ministers and directors of Christian education in many cases have not experienced the kind of searching study of the Bible which would confront them with the basic problems of Biblical interpretation and help them arrive at a refined doctrine of inspiration of the Bible which makes possible the positive and dynamic use of the Bible in teaching and preaching. Often theological students, even in our more highly respected theological schools, do not enroll in courses in Bible beyond the introductory courses, and even when they do, do not get beyond the technical questions. The introductory courses and technical questions are necessary, but the theological student needs to go beyond the technical questions to wrestle with the meanings of the Bible. A student needs to make a comparative study of the gospels and to see first-hand the differences, but he needs also to go beyond these to consideration of conclusions which deal with the actual meanings Jesus intended. The kind of study of the Bible which finally results in an understanding

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 2.

of the real difficulties in responsible interpretation, and yet brings a perspective which results from detailed knowledge of specific passages and sees them in relation to each other, is absolutely necessary to enable ministers and directors of Christian education to use and teach the Bible in our day. The fact that "out of the 471 professors whose records were analyzed . . ." by the writers of The Advancement of Theological Education, ". . . thirty-six had received their primary theological education . . . abroad" and that "an unusually large number of these were biblical scholars"⁵⁵ may indicate insufficient Biblical education in our seminaries in America. Of course, the difference in patterns of pre-theological language study may be a factor, but we need to expand our teaching of courses in Bible to provide the possibility of a much greater facility on the part of our ministers and directors of Christian education to use the Bible as their primary resource and to help the laity to do the same. Unless the ministers and directors of Christian education have seriously considered the problems of the inspiration, authority, and interpretation of the Bible in the light of modern scholarship, they are hardly prepared to use the Bible as their primary resource nor to help others do so. They must learn to be responsible teachers and interpreters of the Bible with freedom of inquiry both for themselves and those they teach.

⁵⁵Niebuhr, Williams, and Gustafson, p. 55.

Bible when he recognizes that ". . . In most congregations there are folk drilled in the older methods of employing Scripture" and comments that "they are often the salt of the earth--folk of consistent and effective Christian lives and of reliable devotion to the Kingdom."² He suggests that if a minister disagrees with the "older methods of employing Scripture," ". . . he must not give the impression of doing so ignorantly or flippantly, without long reflection, sound reason, and conscientious decision."³ Rather he must be seen to be ". . . a thorough, thoughtful, reverent student of the Book."⁴ But Fosdick also points out the need of many other people in our churches who cannot use the older methods of interpretation of the Bible, whose real difficulties are found ". . . in Biblical categories which they no longer believe--miracles, demons, fiat creation, apocalyptic hopes, eternal hell, or ethical conceptions of Jehovah in the Old Testament that shock the modern conscience."⁵ Therefore, to minister to these people, a minister must have experienced and understood these problems, but "not overlooking any of the facts, he must have come out with a positive, reasonable, fruitful attitude toward

²Fosdick, The Modern Use of the Bible, p. 4.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 5.

CHAPTER XIX

FREE TEACHING AND STUDY OF THE BIBLE

No part of the educational work of the local church is more important than the teaching and study of the Bible. The Bible contains the earliest written testimony to the life and teachings of Jesus the Christ and is the best source we have for information concerning the beginning and early life of the Christian church to at least 100 A.D. As such it is of key importance that we be able to understand and use the Bible as our primary resource for Christian living and teaching. But how can we help people gain the experience necessary to understand the Bible and use it responsibly? How can we help the people in our churches study it with freedom and profit?

First, our approach to the teaching and study of the Bible must be serious and humble. The emotional problems of people of literalist or conservative background as discussed previously¹ must never be forgotten and must be sympathetically understood. We must recognize the need for a constructive and sincere attitude and approach which seeks honestly to know the truth. Harry Emerson Fosdick expresses this kind of attitude in his Modern Use of the

¹Above, pp. 344-66.

the Book."⁶ In our teaching and study of the Bible we must have constantly in mind the needs of both of these groups in our churches, as well as those who have not faced the issues.

In speaking of the fundamentalist controversy in the early years of this century, Blanche Carrier comments that ". . . the majority of church members . . . avoided the conflict and came to content themselves with vague notions as to what they believed."⁷ She thinks that "the modern church was so weakened by such tolerance that today few people can give a clear statement as to what they believe; they feel that it matters very little what they do believe."⁸ As we approach the study of the Bible, we must do so with good will and fairness, and with respect for honest differences of opinion, but we should also expect distinct conclusions as a result of the study.

Second, as we try to teach and study the Bible with freedom of inquiry, we must never forget the importance of first-hand study. Many of the problems involved in interpreting the Bible cannot be understood and appreciated until they have been experienced. Therefore, it is strategic to provide the kind of first-hand study which confronts people with the problems of honest and searching study of the Bible. For this purpose, there is no better place to

⁶Ibid.

⁷Carrier, p. 54.

⁸Ibid.

start than with a comparative study of the gospels. This kind of study using Gospel Parallels,⁹ or some similar tool which arranges the gospels in parallel columns for easy comparison, and supplemented by good resource materials, helps people to experience some of the difficulties and to search beyond the difficulties for intelligent conclusions. Such a study confronts people with the problem of variance of detail, differences of interpretation of the meaning of Jesus in some instances, and leads them into first-hand encounter with the message of Jesus as they try to go behind the differences to understand what Jesus was trying to say. Then the way is opened for an understanding of the problem of literalism and legalism in the light of the teachings of Jesus. Further, a new understanding of the meaning of inspiration can come out of such a study. If it is preferred, a similar type of study could start with the Old Testament, but utilizing the consideration of the variant accounts of creation and the flood which help people see the reason for the documentary hypothesis of the origin of the Pentateuch. Once people have experienced the problems of interpretation which come with a careful and honest study of the Bible, they are much less likely to be dogmatic about their views and much more likely

⁹Gospel Parallels--A Synopsis of the First Three Gospels with alternative readings from the Manuscripts and Non-Canonical Parallels (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1949).

to be receptive to consideration of the findings of Biblical scholarship.

Third, this kind of free-inquiry study of the Bible can be structured so that people of both conservative and liberal sympathies can study together and learn to respect each other. Furthermore, as they are led into an honest search for truth together, they are likely to grow closer together in their thinking. The suggestions made earlier for structuring such a study experience¹⁰ are relevant here. Most people are sympathetic to the approach that if the truth is given a fair hearing, it has nothing to fear from free and full inquiry. Therefore, people are usually willing to have various views presented for consideration if they feel that the views they hold will be treated fairly. An appeal can also be made for people to take a fresh look with an open mind, especially toward the claims of rival groups and toward the new evidence resulting from Biblical research.

Fourth, we must provide the kind of free-inquiry study of the Bible which leads people beyond the technical details to possible positive conclusions. Robert W. Spike, Director of the Department of Evangelism of the Board of Home Missions of the Congregational Christian Churches and formerly minister of Memorial Church in New York City, notes

¹⁰ Above, pp. 353-66.

how difficult it is ". . . for people to accept the reality of a given Word of God, if it is not presented as literal Biblicism or the pronouncements of an infallible church."¹¹ But he comments that ". . . like our fathers before us, we have discovered that the Bible is the most authentic vessel of the word of God," and that "we have come through strenuous decades of the most minute dissection of the text and background of the Scriptures, to discover that the Word that is written here shines with greater clarity than ever before."¹² But we must be careful to carry our teaching and study far enough that this good result comes. Harry Emerson Fosdick has an excellent chapter on the perils of the modern approach to the Bible and points out that "it is possible to be emancipated from the bondage of ancient categories without undertaking the mental toil of constructing new ones . . . " with the result that there ". . . is obscurity and confusion."¹³ He recognizes the need for the best possible statements of the abiding experiences of the Christian and observes as follows: "Let the experience of redemption

¹¹Robert W. Spike, In But Not of the World, A Notebook of Theology and Practice in the Local Church (New York: Association Press, 1957), p. 52. (Published for The Interseminary Committee of The National Council of Churches. Opposite the title page it is stated: "Initially this little book was asked for by the Interseminary Committee of the National Council of Churches, to provide a study book about the ministry for a national conference of the Interseminary Movement.")

¹²Ibid.

¹³Fosdick, The Modern Use of the Bible, pp. 182-83.

through Christ once get itself expressed in a mental formula which is generally believed and confidently proclaimed, and the truth gains both vital and intellectual impact difficult to resist."¹⁴

We should always bear in mind that the goals of Bible study include the confrontation of every person with the call of Christ to every man to repent, accept the forgiveness and love of God, and become God's servant. Further, each person should learn to use and understand the Bible responsibly as the primary source for Christian living and thinking. In our attempt to be nonauthoritarian and respect each person's freedom, we must also recognize each person's right and need to consider the final conclusions which can come from Bible study, and we must recognize each person's need to be confronted with them so he will have the basis in experience to make an intelligent decision.

Advantages of Nonauthoritarian Teaching and Study of the Bible

First, the nonauthoritarian approach to Christian education is particularly suited for study groups with adolescents and college students who want to evaluate their religious heritage and who want to think for themselves. There is a refreshing reality to first-hand study of the Bible which faces squarely the problems and questions of

¹⁴Ibid., p. 183.

people and helps them seek light upon them. This approach to Bible study and teaching is also well suited to teaching adults who want to learn more about the Bible and to adults who have questions about the Bible and Christian history to which they have never found satisfactory answers.

Second, the summer camp and conference programs of our churches can utilize the nonauthoritarian, free-inquiry method of study to advantage. The people attending such camps and conferences are usually from different communities and local churches so that the nonauthoritarian teaching approach may be more acceptable under such circumstances. The summer camp or conference offers an excellent opportunity to provide some intensive study of well-defined subjects or doctrines. There is the advantage that the group can meet often enough to provide continuity and to pursue a limited field of study far enough to consider conclusions without undue delay. In a camp or conference situation, it may also be possible for the more capable leaders to teach in the fields of Bible and Church history and doctrine. In interdenominational student conferences, there is an excellent opportunity for this kind of nonauthoritarian free-inquiry study. This is already being done extensively in the student Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. regional conferences.

Third, this free-inquiry, nonsectarian approach is suitable for college and university teaching even in

state-supported institutions of higher education; in fact, without it, the student who attends a state-supported college or university may be penalized by the lack of opportunity for free-inquiry study in this field of knowledge and thought.¹⁵ However, a caution should be expressed against the acceptance for credit in a state-supported institution for courses which present only the thinking of one church or group; this can easily become sectarian because of the limited approach.¹⁶ In

¹⁵Excellent discussions of the place of the teaching in higher education of courses in Bible and religion are available: see especially Christian Gauss, The Teaching of Religion in American Higher Education (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1951); Walter Moberly, The Crisis in the University (London: SCM Press, 1949); Arnold Nash, The University and the Modern World (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943); Huston Smith, The Purposes of Higher Education (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1955); Seymour Smith, "Religion in State Teachers Colleges," Teacher Education Quarterly, IX (Winter, 1952), 51-56; and Amos N. Wilder, Liberal Learning and Religion (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1951).

¹⁶An examination of the course listings for the School of Religion at the State University of Iowa illustrates this. Of the forty courses listed, fifteen are taught by a Roman Catholic priest and are specifically Roman Catholic, with such titles as "Introduction to Catholicism," "The Catholic Church to 1500," "Life Problems," and "Catholic Life and Worship." Eleven courses are listed as taught by various Protestant professors and include "Protestant Faith" and "Contemporary Protestant Thought." Twelve courses are listed as taught by the Jewish Professor and include courses on the Old Testament, the Hebrew language, and "Contemporary Jewish problems." There are also separate listings for Roman Catholic and Protestant treatments of the Bible and Christian thought. For example: The "New Testament" course taught by a Protestant is balanced by "The Gospels" taught by the Roman Catholic priest--both deal with the life and teachings of Jesus. Similar separate treatment is provided for Church history, the Reformation, and problems of marriage and family. Although it might be possible for such courses to be taught in a nonsectarian spirit, nevertheless, the door is open for a sectarian result. There is the statement under "Graduate Requirements" which states that "course distribution should

a state-supported institution, the various points of view should be presented in the same class and by articulate adherents of those views wherever possible. This method was utilized by the writer in the affiliated School of Religion at Montana State University and is being continued by his successor.¹⁷ Representatives of the various religious groups are invited into the classes at appropriate times, each to present the thinking of his religious group and to answer questions asked by the students. But the students hear the various points of view presented in the same class and are not shielded from hearing views opposed to theirs. The students hear the various interpretations of Jesus, the Church, and other doctrines, but are left free to come to their own conclusions. If a student wants counsel with any of the invited speakers, with the instructor, or the chaplain or student religious worker or pastor of his church, he is perfectly free to consult them outside of class. This method provides nonsectarian, free-inquiry study in the field of Bible and religion and prevents the sectarian result which

be such that the candidate will be well grounded in the history and thought of Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism," but there is no such suggestion referring to undergraduates. Therefore, simply by choosing courses taught by the Roman Catholic priest the way is open for an undergraduate to receive credit for Roman Catholic indoctrination in a state-supported university. See Catalogue of the State University of Iowa for the year 1957 (Iowa City, Iowa: State University of Iowa, 1957), pp. 128-30.

¹⁷Deane W. Fenn, "Teaching Religion in a State University," Religious Education, LI (July-Aug., 1956), 286-89.

may come from separate courses dealing with the faith and thinking of a particular group or groups. A similar method could be used in independent and church-related institutions to provide truly nonauthoritarian and free-inquiry study in the field of religion.

Fourth, the nonauthoritarian, free-inquiry approach to the study of the Bible is especially useful for inter-denominational and ecumenical study situations. Because of the wide differences of opinion about the Bible and how it should be interpreted, it is especially helpful to go back to the source and restudy it together. Suzanne de Diétrich, long active in the World's Student Christian Federation and a lecturer at the Ecumenical Institute in 1949, states that "when Christians search the Scriptures together in an attitude of earnest and humble expectation, something happens. God speaks and the written word becomes a living Word for this generation."¹⁸ She asserts that "we have seen it happen again and again: on a local scale, in Youth or parish groups; on a national scale, in Student Conferences; on an international scale at the great Youth Assemblies, Amsterdam 1939, Oslo 1947; in session after session at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey."¹⁹ The nonauthoritarian, free-inquiry approach makes this kind of result possible when people of varying

¹⁸Diétrich, The Ecumenical Review, I (Summer, 1949), 413.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 414.

views and backgrounds honestly seek the truth together. It is significant that the World Council of Churches is referring to the Bible repeatedly to find the basis for its unity. The process is only well begun, but it is an important beginning. The symposium on "The Biblical Authority for the Churches' Social and Political Message Today" is an excellent example. In the foreword to this symposium published under the title Biblical Authority for Today, the nineteen members of the committee which cooperated in this study state as follows:

"In this book we, as members of different Christian confessions and denominations, living in different parts of the world, have made an attempt to read and interpret Holy Scripture together.²⁰ It is clear that they did not come to full agreement, as they admit,²¹ but they did come to substantial agreement on a list of "Guiding Principles for Interpretation of the Bible."²² The hope for the increasing unity of the Church is closely related to such a free-inquiry approach to the study of the Bible which makes it possible for those of the various denominations to search for the truth together. The same could be said for the study of Church history and Christian doctrine, both of which have their earliest statements and beginnings reported in the Bible. In interdenominational youth meetings and student conferences, the

²⁰Richardson and Schweitzer, eds., p. 7.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., pp. 240-244.

nonauthoritarian and free-inquiry approach makes possible the study of the Bible together across all denominational lines and challenges people to look again at their interpretations and the interpretations of others. Resources for this kind of Bible study are now available through interdenominational agencies like the United Student Christian Council and the United Christian Youth Movement.

Fifth, the nonauthoritarian, free-inquiry approach to the study of the Bible also makes possible the consideration of the claimed results of the historical method. Murray suggests that "the historical method, wisely pursued, is the best argument against a foolish theory of infallibility and the best prophylactic against scepticism, for it recognizes that ordinary human life and experience are the stuff out of which history is made, and that they are as relevant to the interpretation of the Bible as is the best historical scholarship.²³ We should not force the historical method upon people, but at least give them an opportunity to become acquainted with it and its claimed results so they can decide for themselves. Ian Pitt-Watson of Scotland, in an address at an ecumenical Student Pastors' Conference in 1954, suggests there may be a scandal of silence ". . . concerning the nature of the Holy Book which we preach."²⁴ He suggests that although

²³Murray, p. 177.

²⁴Ian Pitt-Watson, "The Communication of the Gospel to Students." An address delivered at the Student Pastors' Conference, sponsored jointly by the W.S.C.F. and the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches, and held at the Institute near Geneva, Switzerland, May 24-31, 1954, The Student World, XLVII (third quarter, 1954), 257.

the major battles over the analytical and historical study of the Bible are over, and ". . . an impressive measure of agreement reached . . . " this agreement has not been communicated to the laity, and therefore, ". . . only a very small percentage of students have any clearly defined notion of what they mean when they call the Bible 'the word of God,'"²⁵ He suggests that "most of those who do know are fundamentalist in persuasion and have simply refused to acknowledge any truth in the whole criticism movement."²⁶ Our people need to hear the case for the historical method of study of the Bible and to experience the need for it and the possible positive results from it.

Sixth, the nonauthoritarian approach to the study of the Bible in the light of what modern scholarship has to say can result in the recovery or revitalization of the Christian faith by many people. Rylaarsdam points out that the theological revival today ". . . especially in its dominant neo-orthodox expression, first presented itself as a recovery of the biblical message as such."²⁷ He thinks that the "drive and exuberance" of this movement ". . . consisted in the awareness that the authority of the biblical message for the community of faith was not adversely affected by the fact that the Bible, viewed objectively, was conditioned by the

²⁵Ibid., pp. 257-58.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Rylaarsdam, The Chicago Theological Seminary Register, XLVI (Nov. 1956), p. 5.

relativities of history in precisely the same way as any other historical phenomena."²⁸ Thus the Bible is again authoritative for the Christian, although he has learned to evaluate its various levels of thought and to make allowances for the different thought forms and prescientific ideas of the universe and our world which the Bible contains. But the essential message of the Gospel is seen to be free from the relativities of history and ancient thought forms and as relevant to life today and tomorrow as to any past age. Rylaarsdam also speaks of ". . . the paradoxical fact that, to play its 'authoritative' role, the Bible must function as the servant by means of which the Church proclaims its faith and at the same time serve as the norm by which all forms of the Church's proclamation are critically assessed"; he thinks "it is the merit of scientific scholarship that it enables the Bible to perform this latter function."²⁹ With the free-inquiry study of the Bible, it is possible for seeking people to come to understand this. Fosdick helped countless people do just this, for he understood that "in the last analysis all the controversies that vex our modern churches come back to this central matter: how are we using the Bible?" and that there is ". . . no hope of unsnarling our sadly perplexed religious thinking until we achieve and make popularly effective an intelligent employment of the scriptures."³⁰ This is one of the most urgent tasks before us,

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 2.

³⁰Fosdick, The Modern Use of the Bible, p. 4.

and a task for which the nonauthoritarian approach to Bible study is exceptionally well suited. This requires teachers trained in the art of nonsectarian study and teaching.

Training Nonauthoritarian Teachers

If we are to meet the needs in our churches for non-authoritarian and free-inquiry study of the Bible, and of Church history and doctrine, we must train lay people in this way. With the great demands upon the pastor's time, he cannot be expected to teach any large number of study groups. Most of the Sunday School teaching in the vast majority of churches will continue to be done by volunteer teachers. Therefore, the training of lay teachers and leaders is of extreme importance.

The best way to train teachers and leaders to teach in a nonauthoritarian way is to provide a nonauthoritarian and free-inquiry learning experience for them. This should be done by the pastor or minister or director of Christian education. A good example of the possibility is the Bible study program of Hillcrest Church in Pleasant Hill, California, as reported by the pastor in the Congregational Christian Journal Advance.³¹ At the time of the writing of the article, the church had thirteen Bible study groups and had prospects for nine more. The program began with the minister who teaches lay people, who in turn become lay teachers of other lay people. This plan is especially well adapted to the

³¹A. Ray Petty, "Bible Study Can Be Exciting," Advance, CXLIX (Nov. 1, 1957), 12-13.

teaching of adults and could be of great assistance in providing qualified Sunday School teachers. In the training study sessions, the leaders seek information and understanding on their own questions and on questions that may be anticipated. If the lay person is helped to think for himself and to wrestle with the problems and issues involved, then he is much more likely to be able to help others as they face similar questions.

In talking with Mrs. Cyrie Petersen, the Christian Education Assistant at Hillcrest Church, the writer learned that those who became interested in Bible study wanted to go beyond the introductory treatment to the first-hand study of the Bible with the help of resource material.³² Mrs. Petersen also said that there was a men's Bible study group that met at 8:30 Friday mornings, and that each man leads four consecutive sessions. Here is great opportunity for the training of lay leaders to teach other lay people and to teach in the Sunday school. Parents and other adults who have studied in such groups and learned to think for themselves should make excellent teachers for adolescents as they want to think and examine for themselves the validity of the Bible and the Christian Gospel. Good materials could be suggested by almost any of the offices of the non-conservative or non-fundamentalist denominations. However, the success of such a program will depend primarily upon the attitude and approach

³²This was an interview with Mrs. Petersen at Pacific School of Religion in November, 1957.

of the minister, and the director of Christian education if there is one. Here is a great opportunity for the deepening and revitalizing of the spiritual life within our churches and for the training of needed teachers and lay leaders at the same time.

The Bible and Unity

It must be admitted that the Bible has not always been a force for unity as it has been used. Even in the days of the Reformation, Zwingli and Luther could not agree on the interpretation of the passages of Scripture relating to the Eucharist, and when people began to read and interpret the Bible for themselves, there was disagreement resulting in the Anabaptist movement. In our own country with its separation of Church and State, there has been a minimum of religious persecution, and there has been and continues to be a wide diversity of denominations and sects resulting at least partly from the freedom of any interested person to interpret the Bible as he thinks best. A Gabriel Hebert refers to the freedom in England and America ". . . for every man to interpret the Bible in his own way . . . " and thinks that ". . . in consequence the Bible has lost the note of religious authority which is proper to it."³³ Visser 't Hooft, in an address on "The Bible in An Ecumenical Setting" at the Bible Study Conference at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland, September 2-12, 1955, recognizes ". . . the fact

³³Hebert, Anglican Theological Review, XXXI (Oct., 1949), 210.

that in the history of the Church and in the relations between churches of different kinds, the Bible has, on the whole, been a divisive factor," and that ". . . most of the great theological battles between the confessions have been battles about the Bible."³⁴ With the legalistic attitudes toward religion and the Bible that have been so common, it is not surprising there have been major and heated disagreements over the meaning and interpretation of the Bible. But it is in seeking a solution to this very difficulty that the nonauthoritarian and free-inquiry study of the Bible can render one of its greatest services.

The results of Biblical and historical research have freed countless people from the literalistic and legalistic approach to the Bible and have caused them to approach the study of the Bible and Christian doctrine with a new openness and a new freedom. And as a result they have often felt the pain of their division and have sought greater unity with Christians of other denominations. As Christians seek to overcome their disunity, it is proper and significant that they return to the study of the Bible which they all have in common. It is because of this fact that the Bible may now become a force for unity. Visser 't Hooft underlines the importance of this development and suggests that "it may be that some time we shall come to the conclusion that more important than the rise of the 'ecumenical movement,' more important than the rise of organizations concerned with

³⁴Visser 't Hooft, The Student World, XLIX (First Quarter, 1956), 45.

ecumenical affairs, is the deeper and more basic happening that the Bible is reasserting itself in all confessions, and that the new place of the Bible and the return to it provide a new opportunity, not only for conversation and discussion, but to a large extent also for understanding."³⁵ The non-authoritarian and free-inquiry approach to the teaching and study of the Bible, Church history, and doctrine, is especially well suited to the common search for truth across confessional lines. As people seek to understand what other denominations think and why, as well as to state their own beliefs and the reasons for them, the appeal to the Bible in the honest and free search for truth and enlightenment and in the light of the various interpretations and claims about the Bible holds real possibilities for enabling the Bible to become a force for unity. It is a common and primary source for all Christian churches--as we study it together in freedom and honesty, and with our minds open to new truth and understanding, we may be led closer together in our understanding of the Christian Gospel and in our efforts to evangelize and serve each generation according to God's will.

However, for the Bible to be a force for unity among Christians, there must be freedom of inquiry, and also availability of study materials. W. J. Platt, General Secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society, refers to a campaign in Britain to emphasize the centrality of the Bible for Christian life and writes in part: ". . . with the help of theological professors on its committee, there was an effort,

³⁵Ibid.

unfortunately as yet only partly successful, to mediate to the parish priest as to the man in the pew the new and positive insights concerning the Bible which have been brought to us by half a century of scholarship."³⁶ A somewhat similar effort in America has been the work of the Committee on the Use and Understanding of the Bible which in recent years had provided leadership and help in these matters for a wide variety of denominational, interdenominational, and local church Bible study programs.³⁷ The article by Platt recognizes the need for information as a help to people to interpret the Bible and even states that ". . . during recent years the Bible Societies have become increasingly conscious that they were in danger of taking too legal a view of the phrase in their constitution which speaks of circulating the Scriptures 'without note or comment.'³⁸ This suggests that experience has shown that people need resource materials to enable them to use the Bible fairly and most profitably, and the legal proscription may need to be changed in the

³⁶W. J. Platt, "The Bible Societies and Cooperation Amongst the Churches," The Ecumenical Review, VI (July, 1954), 382.

³⁷For information on the work of this Committee, the writer is indebted to Dr. Gerald A. Larue, Associate Director of the Committee on the Use and Understanding of the Bible of the National Council of Churches. Dr. Larue has his office at 305 Grant Building, 1095 Market Street, San Francisco 3, California, and in several conversations over the past year, especially in an interview at Pacific School of Religion in January, 1958, has told the writer of his work.

³⁸Platt, The Ecumenical Review, VI (July, 1954), 381.

light of this experience. Certainly there is great need for fair and honest study materials to be available to help people understand and use the Bible responsibly.

With the nonauthoritarian and free-inquiry approach to Bible study, ecumenical Bible study is possible, and has real promise of bringing divided Christians closer together. A World Council of Churches study group dealing with "The Bible and the Church's Message to the World" expresses the belief that "if we open the Bible and try to read and interpret it together, it will again and again lead us back to the living Word of God, to mutual understanding and to increasing unity of witness in the ecumenical movement."³⁹ This study group also states the agreement of its members--twenty theologians from eight countries and ten different confessions-- ". . . that the Bible is our common starting point, for there God's Word confronts us, a Word which humbles the hearers so that they are more ready to listen and to discuss than they are to assert their own opinions."⁴⁰ Wolfgang Schweitzer, a Secretary in the Study Department of the World Council of Churches, calls attention to the fact that "every participant in ecumenical discussion, and indeed any ordinary reader of the Bible, brings with him certain presuppositions which have

³⁹The World Council of Churches, "Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of the Bible," Report of a study group on the theme: "The Bible and the Church's Message to the World" at the Study Committee of the World Council of Churches at its annual meeting at Wadham College, Oxford, June 28th to July 6th, 1949, The Ecumenical Review, II (Autumn, 1949), 83.

⁴⁰Ibid.

made possible for him an understanding of the Bible," and that "the fact of these presuppositions . . . makes extraordinarily difficult the determination of general principles for the interpretation of the Scriptures, and, in consequence, any common interpretation of them."⁴¹ As a result, Schweitzer states that "Progress can only be made if we allow the Bible itself to destroy our own presuppositions," and he thinks that "in this process, ecumenical discussions can be of the greatest importance."⁴²

However, we must not overlook the difficulties in ecumenical Bible study, especially when people of the Eastern Orthodox churches are included. Helle Georgiadis makes this very clear in her comments on "The Bible in An Ecumenical Setting" at the Bible Study Conference at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland in September, 1955. She stated that in participating in ecumenical Bible study, the Orthodox ". . . make an affirmation . . . " and the Protestants ". . . participate as a seeking of what God has to say."⁴³ She stated further that "the difference comes

⁴¹Wolfgang Schweitzer, "The Bible and the Church's Message to the World," The Ecumenical Review, II (Winter, 1950), 128.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Helle Georgiadis, Comments on "The Bible in an Ecumenical Setting," following two addresses on the subject at the Bible Study Conference held at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, Sept. 2-12, 1955, The Student World, XLIX (First Quarter, 1956), 54.

from the fact that we have an authoritative interpretation of faith in the Church. Therefore Protestant questioning and Orthodox questioning have a fundamentally different character."⁴⁴ Nevertheless, in spite of the difficulties in ecumenical Bible study, Visser 't Hooft insists that ". . . even though at times it will be terribly difficult to start it, and it will be even more difficult to continue with it, and in many cases we may come up against a blank wall, we must all insist that Bible study in an ecumenical setting is indispensable for the health and the progress of a true ecumenical movement."⁴⁵ He is convinced that "more light is yet to break forth from the Word of God precisely when we are exposing ourselves to it in the new and fuller way."⁴⁶

For ecumenical Bible study, the nonauthoritarian, free-inquiry approach is necessary because it is only as we cease trying to convince someone else of the validity of our opinions and go with him to make a fresh study of the Bible together in the light of the various claims and all the available evidence that we open our minds and hearts to new understanding. The Bible can unite us if we will come to it with open minds and seek truth together. This does not mean that we may necessarily agree on every detail, but there is

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Visser 't Hooft, The Student World, XLIX (First Quarter, 1956), 51.

⁴⁶Ibid.

an increase in understanding and love, and the hope of greater unity at least in spirit. Suzanne de Miétrich, a lecturer at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland, testifies to the good results of ecumenical Bible study and summarizes the unifying effect of the Bible when studied together by saying, "the Bible unites only those who are willing to be stripped naked by the sword of the Divine Word, and who hunger and thirst after righteousness."⁴⁷ With freedom of inquiry and the honest search together for truth, God can speak to us through the Bible and bring us into fuller Christian unity as we see His Truth together. How far this process will go we cannot say, but it may be significant that in the Bible Study Conference held at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland, in September, 1955, a Roman Catholic priest was present to give one of the lectures and take part in the discussion along with Protestants and Eastern Orthodox people.⁴⁸ Luther A. Waigle, Dean Emeritus of the Yale University Divinity School, writes that "the Pope has authorized Catholic scholars to make translations of the Scriptures from the original Hebrew

⁴⁷Suzanne de Miétrich, "The Bible, a Force for Unity," The Ecumenical Review, I (Summer, 1948), 413-14.

⁴⁸"The Bible in An Ecumenical Setting," A Panel of two addresses, followed by comments of a third speaker and discussion, given at the Bible Study Conference held at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, Sept. 2-12, 1955, The Student World, XLIX (First Quarter, 1956), 40-56.

and Drees.²⁴⁸ There may be some hope that this renewed study of the Bible may slice Joe's truth to break through the authoritarian shackles that have often been placed around it. At least renewed study in the light of archaeological and manuscript discoveries may lead to greater insight and understanding by all concerned and should be a unifying factor rather than a divisive one.

CHAPTER XX

MEETING THE AUTHORITARIAN CHALLENGE

This study of authority and freedom in the Protestant Churches of America today and the implications and requirements for Christian education has led to the consideration of the nature and problem of authority and freedom in religion, a demonstration of the differences of opinion regarding every authority below God, and therefore the presentation of the view that the only legitimate functioning authority for the Christian is his own total experience, including his best thinking and the experiences and thinking of others as any given individual has appropriated them. Therefore, every claim by any church or human being for religious authority over other people is subject to the decision of the individual, and every claim of anyone that he speaks God's truth and will is subject to the evaluation and acceptance or rejection by the individual. Following this, the implications and requirements for Christian education in the light of the freedom of the individual and his right to make his own choices were discussed and suggestions made for nonauthoritarian teaching that would respect the rights of individuals and yet

understand the needs of people and confront them with the Christian Gospel. But now we must consider the practical problem of how we can carry on the educational work of our churches in a nonauthoritarian way in the face of the challenge of the authoritarian groups with their dogmatic assertions of the absolute truth of their beliefs and teachings.

The Nature of the Challenge

First, the challenge of the authoritarian religious groups is numerical. It is common knowledge that the fundamentalist religious groups are growing faster than are the liberal groups. Blanche Carrier summarizes the numerical trend by pointing out that "in the years since 1926 there has been a 32.8 per cent gain in membership in churches" but that ". . . the percentage of increase in fundamentalist churches has been twice as high as that in the so-called liberal churches."¹ Further, in the study of 414 Harvard undergraduates and 86 Radcliffe undergraduates by Allport, Gillespie, and Young during the fall term of 1946, it was revealed that, of those tested, ". . . only about 60 per cent of the students who feel the need for a religious orientation find the system in which they were reared satisfactory to their needs," but that ". . . among the Roman Catholic students who still feel the need for religion 85 per cent express themselves as satisfied with

¹Carrier, p. 57.

this system of faith."² This raises the serious question whether the nonauthoritarian churches, which are usually the less conservative ones, are adequately confronting their youth and people with the Christian Gospel and asking for Christian decision. The challenge of the authoritarians is certainly partly numerical.

But what is the appeal of the authoritarian churches? We can understand the conditioning effect of childhood indoctrination on Roman Catholic children and young people and their tendency to continue in that faith, but why are the fundamentalist churches growing so much faster than the more liberal churches? In an article on "Crucial Challenges to Present Day Religious Education" Nevin C. Harner asks if people are turning to the conservative groups because they have deep needs that are not being met in the more liberal churches and suggests that "as one surveys the basic characteristics of these conservative movements, three stand out in bold relief which constitute in each case a distinct challenge."³ According to Harner, these three characteristics are: ". . . definite doctrinal assurance as contrasted with nebulosity and negativism. . . . hearty emotional expression and release as contrasted with a cold,

²Allport, p. 41.

³Nevin C. Harner, "Crucial Challenges to Present Day Religious Education," Religious Education, XLV (May-June, 1950), 160-61.

inhibited, sophisticated intellectualism. . . . [and] a cordial, heart-warming fellowship as contrasted with strict religious propriety, decorum, and etiquette."⁴ Harner states his view of the importance of the challenge in this way:

They know what they believe, and they offer it in unmistakable, satisfying fashion to their converts. We may think their beliefs are wrong in many cases, based on an untenable biblicism, and dogmatically proclaimed without due regard for the democratic process; but that is neither here nor there. They think they are right. They find the biblical foundation satisfactory. And they see nothing wrong in announcing dogmas for implicit acceptance with no if's, but's, or and's about it. In this respect, we liberals suffer at times in comparison. . . . We often hedge our beliefs about with so many enervating qualifications. We derive them so precariously from this, that, or the other postulate. We proclaim them so timidly. We have been frequently much better at declaring what we do not believe, than what we do. And hungry people are not fed. Unless liberalism can find a way of enunciating something sure to live by and die by, it is foredoomed to defeat.⁵

These are strong words which suggest the challenge of the authoritarians comes at least partially from the failings of the nonauthoritarians. The desire for definiteness and clarity of belief is very understandable, and the need for "heartly emotional expression" and "a cordial, heart-warming fellowship" is basic to all of us. However, the failure of many liberal churches on these points is not necessarily a result of a nonauthoritarian approach. The real challenge is to meet the religious needs of people.

⁴Ibid., p. 161.

⁵Ibid.

In a three-year study of "The 'New Churches' in a Small City," W. Seward Salisbury, Professor in the Social Studies Department at the Teachers College of the State University of New York, Oswego, New York, reports the case of a young minister not long out of Bible College who was called to be the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Oswego, New York. He began preaching the "old time" religion with the result that the congregation was split, with the fundamentalist pastor leaving and taking a minority group with him, and forming the Baptist Tabernacle. Salisbury characterizes the fundamentalist clergy in the area he studied as ". . . marked by their sincerity. . . . very democratic in thought and action . . . " and not pretending ". . . to know more than any of their followers beyond the 'word' as revealed in the Bible."⁶ He adds that the ". . . sincerity and faith [of the fundamentalist pastors] carries conviction to their congregations" and that "the Bible is to their followers what they, the pastors, say it is."⁷ We might point out that in relation to the interpretation of the Bible these pastors are not so democratic, and the one pastor would hardly have left the First Baptist Church with the majority against him if his democracy had carried over into his religious attitudes and conduct.

⁶W. Seward Salisbury, "The 'New Churches' in a Small City," Religious Education, XLIX (May-June, 1954), 213.

⁷Ibid.

Salisbury also notes that the religion preached at the Baptist Tabernacle ". . . is definite and personal" with "many sermons . . . liberally sprinkled with 'heaven' and 'hell,' 'lost' and 'saved,' 'saint' and 'sinner.'"⁸ For the fundamentalist pastors in the vicinity of Oswego, "the problem of religion was to 'come back' to the Scriptures' and the 'Bible messages.'"⁹ Salisbury notes that the pastor of the Baptist Tabernacle has been very successful in his work with young people and that "several deeply religious persons belonging to churches of the liberal Protestant group have broken away from their original church home and affiliated with the Tabernacle."¹⁰ These families were attempting ". . . to achieve a more personalized religion, even at the expense of moving into a prestige group somewhat lower in the social-class pyramid than the congregations they have just left."¹¹ One further statement by Salisbury is significant; he states that "more than any other church in Oswego the Baptist Tabernacle is the creation of the charismatic qualities of its pastor."¹² This last statement suggests some real caution in evaluating the challenge of this particular pastor. But the challenges which stand out in this study as reported by Salisbury are the personal and

⁸Ibid., p. 212.

⁹Ibid., p. 213.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

definite nature of the religion preached, the emphasis on the Bible and what the fundamentalists believe the Biblical message to be, and the attraction of a convinced and sincere person who convinces others he is right.

An interesting study of the "Non-Denominational Youth Movements" was made by the Rev. Leslie Conrad, Jr., Executive Secretary of the Luther League of America, and reported in the International Journal of Religious Education for June, 1956.¹³ Conrad evaluates the "commendable" and "objectionable" features of the programs of "Youth on the March," "Young Life," "Word of Life," and "Youth for Christ." As "commendable features" Conrad lists "an exalted Bible," "youth work know-how," "enlistment of sponsorship and leadership," "public profession of Christ," and "truth through personality." He asks why their success and answers: "These movements have programs that are challenging. They may be more exciting than the youth programs of the home churches. Each movement always has 'something cooking.'¹⁴ As "objectionable features" Conrad lists "omission of the sacraments," "dividing church loyalties," "voice of youth lacking," and a lack of the recognition of the human nurture approach with a corresponding overemphasis on the "'born-again

¹³Leslie Conrad, Jr., "Non-Denominational Youth Movements," International Journal of Religious Education, XXXII (June, 1956), 14-16, 38. (The complete report may be obtained from the Youth Dept. of the National Council of Churches, 257 Fourth Ave., New York 10, N.Y.)

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 14-16.

Christian' interpretation."¹⁵ Included in the practices and program of these movements are challenges that the non-authoritarian churches must meet.

The challenge of the more conservative and authoritarian groups is stated directly and emphatically by Frank E. Gaebeline, Headmaster of Stoney Brook School on Long Island and a member of the commission on education of the National Association of Evangelicals. In his recent book The Pattern of God's Truth he refers to the influence of the learned men Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, and Wesley and then states that ". . . the great turning points of Christian history . . . in every case . . . [have] behind them solid learning used to the glory of God."¹⁶ He even notes that although Moody and Spurgeon ". . . lacked formal education . . ." they nevertheless ". . . valued it so highly that they both founded schools . . ."¹⁷ Gaebeline states his challenge in the following ringing words:

. . . The reproach of Christ is one thing, and evangelicalism will always have to bear it; the reproach of obscurantism is another thing, and evangelicalism must make up its mind to stop bearing it. The call today is for a renaissance of evangelical scholarship. That renaissance is already under way abroad. In England the evangelical faith has a hold upon some of the best minds in Oxford and Cambridge, to say nothing of fine intellects in

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 15-16.

¹⁶Gaebeline, p. 105.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 105-106.

lesser institutions. The same is true on the Continent. . . . There are also signs that the renaissance is beginning in this country. From the faculties of evangelical colleges and seminaries are coming books and articles of solid worth. Our scholars are making their influence felt in meetings of the great learned societies.

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 Let us stop being on the defensive. Ours is a view of Scripture, of theology, and of life that is in the mainstream of Christian history. It demands not apology but bold presentation. Our task is not only to outlive and outserve those who do not stand for God's truth; it is also by God's grace to out-think them.¹⁸

This is a challenge to the evangelicals to educate themselves better and speak out boldly for what they believe is the traditional Christian message. But at the same time this is a challenge to the nonauthoritarian liberals to improve their work and teaching. Therefore, we must understand and evaluate the importance of this and other challenges coming from the more conservative, fundamentalist, and authoritarian groups.

Understanding and Evaluating the Challenge

An excellent survey of developments within many of the now liberal and nonauthoritarian churches is given by Blanche Carrier in her recent book Free to Grow. She notes the general liberal movement of the early years of this century, including attitudes in political science, religion, and the arts, but notes especially the initial negative results of ". . . the higher criticism of the Bible, which

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 106-107.

. . . gave rise to a negative sort of intellectualism . . ."¹⁹

Carrier refers to the conflicts which developed within the churches as ministers and college students began to study and accept many of these more liberal views and taught them in their churches. The resulting controversy was long and protracted and is continuing today. An interesting and enlightening account of this tragic controversy and the issues involved is given by Harry Emerson Fosdick in his autobiography.²⁰ Although some ministers joined in the controversy between orthodoxy and liberalism, ". . . others felt the need to avoid controversy and to stress spiritual truths common to all Christians."²¹ Carrier states that ". . . the majority of church members . . . also avoided the conflict and came to content themselves with vague notions as to what they believed."²² She thinks that the modern church has been severely weakened by the resulting extreme tolerance and writes that "too few convictions are proving as destructive as too narrow a field of conviction."²³ Carrier points out how psychology in its first statements and overstatements was also upsetting to Christians, and how Bushnell was misinterpreted ". . . to support a routine

¹⁹Carrier, p. 54.

²⁰Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Living of These Days, An Autobiography (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1936), pp. 144-176.

²¹Carrier, p. 54.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

'decision' for the twelve-year-old," and that "too seldom it meant the beginning of consciously and continuously sought growth, with periodic experiences of depth and power."²⁴ She concludes, therefore, that "for this period, then, the Church lost the experience so precious to the Christian heritage of seeing God mightily working in the transformation of men's lives and in the conscious integrating of youthful lives around a vivid purpose and experience."²⁵ Carrier then describes how many Protestant services in the last few decades have moved ". . . farther away from active internal participation by the lay congregation and into the spiritually debilitating process of 'spoon-feeding,' a procedure that promotes mass society."²⁶ She states her opinion that "in the twenties, both ministers and religious education directors, eager to express new ideas and introduce new methods not yet assimilated by the public, took the shorter and less democratic way to that goal by asking for freedom of the pulpit and respect for the expert."²⁷ Carrier states that these ministers and directors of religious education ". . . only too late realized the value of the understanding co-operation which they thus lost."²⁸ Furthermore, with the emphasis upon the

²⁴Ibid., pp. 55-56.

²⁵Ibid., p. 56.

²⁶Ibid., p. 58.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

prime importance of the sermon, many ministers began ". . . to consider the skill of leading discussion and helping people reformulate their own ideas as comparatively unimportant . . ." with the result that ". . . all the services of the church inclined to the pouring-in process with no attention to the assimilating."²⁹ This is a tragic series of events, and yet as we review them, we can understand better the reasons for difficulties which some liberal churches have encountered. However, this should not suggest that all liberal churches went to such extremes.

Another complicating factor in the present scene is the problem of the desire for plausible authorities which can make decisions people feel unable or unwilling to make. Terms such as "flight from freedom" have become common, and many people seem to be willing to be told what to believe if only they can find someone who convinces them of his authority. In his speech before the Interseminary Movement Conference at Oberlin, Ohio, in August, 1957, Visser 't Hooft observed that "There is a new search for authority in the world today . . ." and emphasized the authority of the Christian minister.³⁰ As Paul Tillich points out, in a period of the mass-man, where individuality is seriously threatened or lost, the individual is in danger of losing any vision of meaning in life and of

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Time, LXX (Sept. 9, 1957), 62.

becoming the pawn of authoritarian manipulation.³¹ Carrier, drawing from Tillich, writes as follows:

In a time of mass behavior and mass inertia, people are afraid to make decisions, even though they may want to do so. They are too helpless to decide for themselves, politically, morally or religiously. Such a society seeks in its Church leaders symbols, ideas, final conclusions that are beyond all criticism, in which they can put perfect trust. Moreover, their very need for belongingness and acceptance makes them join the groups that offer such security.

For these two reasons, therefore, people are turning to the Protestant Church in great numbers, but its leaders must be concerned that these mass needs do not distort the essential quality and purpose of the Church.³²

As has already been noted, this increase in Protestant membership is proportionally twice as great in the fundamentalist churches which are more authoritarian.³³ It is easy to understand that the present period of history is one of insecurity and fear in the face of possible atomic and hydrogen warfare. The challenge to nonauthoritarian Christians at this period of history is foreboding and calls for every effort true to the nature of God, man, and the Christian Gospel. It may be that the "The Protestant principle" enunciated by Tillich may be a saving factor--the principle of ". . . divine and human protest against any absolute claim made for a relative reality, even if

³¹Paul Tillich, The Protestant Era, trans. with a concluding essay by James Luther Adams (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 222-233.

³²Carrier, p. 57.

³³Above, p. 419.

this claim is made by a Protestant church."³⁴

As we face these challenges from the authoritarian groups and churches, three basic needs are indicated:

- (1) the need for constructive and positive teaching concerning the Bible, Church history, and the Christian faith;
- (2) the need to teach an understanding of authoritarian views and why they are considered by nonauthoritarian Christians to be unsatisfactory; and (3) the need to develop a warm, vital, dynamic, and distinctively Christian church fellowship.

Constructive and Positive Teaching

In surveying the nature of the authoritarian challenge at the first of this chapter, the need for constructive and positive teaching on several points is evident. Central in the authoritarian challenge is a view of the Bible and an interpretation of Christian history and doctrine which is basic. Here much that has already been stated is relevant.³⁵ For two reasons, we must teach in a nonauthoritarian way the best that we know. First, it is necessary for the understanding and development of a Christian person into a mature Christian; and second, it is necessary to provide the foundation and principle which enable a nonauthoritarian Christian to evaluate and choose between the claims of

³⁴Tillich, p. 163.

³⁵Above, pp. 392-407.

various people regarding the nature and inspiration of the Bible, the central Christian message, and necessary Christian doctrines. We must challenge our people to study the Bible anew, and we must lead them into the first-hand study of the Bible which helps them understand the problems of interpreting it, but which also continues the study until our people see beyond the technical questions to the basic messages of the Bible and are confronted with the call of God through Christ. We must as responsible disciples ask for a positive response and commitment at the appropriate time. This does not mean that we should attempt to force the decision, but we should do all we legitimately can in freedom to insure the call is felt and faced.

A. M. Chirgwin, Research Secretary for the United Bible Societies, writes of ". . . an enquiry into the place of the Bible in world evangelism" which was undertaken "as a contribution to the preparations for the Evanston Assembly . . ." of the World Council of Churches. As a result of the inquiry, he reports the following important facts: ". . . the Scriptures have always been used in evangelistic work; . . . they have proved themselves the most effective of all evangelistic tools; . . . they provide the cutting edge of evangelistic work; . . . they are the best rallying point of the Christian forces; and . . . their distribution and use must increasingly become

the concern of the Churches and their leaders."³⁶ Chirgwin also notes that ". . . in the United States many of the most rapidly growing denominations are those that make the fullest use of the Bible in their evangelistic work, or are most active in distributing it."³⁷ We must teach and utilize the Bible in our educational and evangelistic work if we are to be responsible disciples and help meet the needs of our people.

If the nonauthoritarian churches do not teach the Bible and help their people understand and utilize it in their thinking and living, there are many other groups who will be glad to try to teach their views. So-called "Bible churches" repeatedly present their literalist and fundamentalist interpretations in their churches, and the mediums of radio and television present many programs sponsored by such groups. To get some first-hand materials of this kind, the writer enrolled in a free Bible correspondence course advertised by one such program on television and was appalled at the low quality of the lessons and the dogmatic and narrow way the whole subject is approached.³⁸ People of our nonauthoritarian and more liberal churches

³⁶A. M. Chirgwin, "Have the Bible and Its Circulation Any Significance for the Ecumenical Movement?" The Ecumenical Review, VI (April, 1954), 295.

³⁷Ibid., p. 297.

³⁸The course enrolled in was the one advertised by "Faith For Today," Box 8, New York 8, N.Y.

should do more to make available to the average person the study experiences and materials which will enable them to read and study the Bible with greater understanding and profit. The need for the historical approach to the study of the Bible is asserted again and again by writers in the field,³⁹ and we of the nonauthoritarian Christian churches should take the lead in providing more and better Bible study and education. This in turn lays the foundation for a similar study of Church history and doctrine and the relating of the principles and claims of Christianity and God upon all our lives, individually and collectively. Let us teach our children the best that we know, including our faith in the common man and the freedom of inquiry, but let us teach our insights and conclusions, along with the reasons for them. Then when our children want to evaluate their religious heritage, let us help them rather than hindering them with dogmatism and lack of opportunity and information. We must recognize the need for vital, personal religion, but help people to see the enlarged responsibilities and opportunities which this opens up for all of us. Let us challenge our people to make their public confession of

³⁹ For example: Oscar Cullmann, "The Necessity and Function of Higher Criticism," The Student World, XLII (Second Quarter, 1949), 117-133; J. Eric Penn, "The Word of God and the Written Word," The Student World, XLII (First Quarter, 1949), 107-108; Edwin Lewis, The Biblical Faith and Christian Freedom, especially pp. 15-30, 163-85; Murray, Education Into Religion, pp. vii-viii, 76-77; Ian Pitt-Watson, "The Communication of the Gospel to Students," The Student World, XLVII (Third Quarter, 1954), pp. 257-53.

Christian faith and to live in the spirit and faith of Christ. But we must also teach an understanding of that which we do not believe.

Teach an Understanding of Authoritarian Views

We must teach an understanding of authoritarian views and claims because our understanding of the relativity, although not complete relativism, of all statements of truth requires the freedom of honest examination and evaluation of all statements or formulations about truth in order that we may be able to choose wisely in forming our own conclusions and convictions. Here the nonauthoritarian and free-inquiry teaching approach is advantageous because with it the various opinions are normally included for study and consideration at appropriate places, rather than singled out for denunciation in isolation and thus possibly leaving the impression of negativism rather than a positive and constructive approach. The place for the consideration of authoritarian views of the Bible and the interpretation of it is in the actual free-inquiry study of the Bible where the problems are experienced and consideration of the issues is meaningful. Further, as we recognize that every person must have the opportunity for freedom of choice, we must also recognize that every person must have the realistic opportunity for preparing himself to make responsible choices. This can only come from the experience of facing the issues involved

and considering them with freedom of thought in the light of all the available evidence. This does not mean that no possible conclusions are suggested; rather, it means that the implications of various conclusions are considered, and the basis for making a responsible decision discussed.

Furthermore, we do not need to be authoritarian in our consideration of authoritarian views. We can learn to respect honest differences of opinion, but we need to help people have the opportunity to understand these opinions and the people who profess them. Although others may be authoritarian, we do not need to be. We can be positive and convinced without being dogmatic, and without insisting that every one who disagrees with us is completely wrong. Let us seek to understand the authoritarian claims and evaluate them in fairness and freedom. This does not mean that we should give up our freedom in the process, but let us meet the authoritarian claims with better thinking and sounder education and teaching. It may also be that part of our teaching responsibility is to help our people see the need for exercising their own best judgment rather than allowing others who claim authority to try to make their decisions for them. This is part of the Christian interpretation of life which sees life as an opportunity to grow in the image of God by making the right choices, and living in the spirit of love for God and man which Jesus the Christ taught and exemplified.

Develop a Distinctive and Vital Christian Fellowship

There is no fellowship equal to that of people who share a common fundamental loyalty and work together in a common cause. One of the great strengths of the Christian faith is the loyalty to a common Lord and to the cause of the highest welfare of all people as potential children of God. When people become thoroughly convinced of the truth and love of God as revealed most fully in Christ, and commit themselves to the doing of God's will on earth, they become dynamic and vital persons. The primary need of every human being is the experience of the love and call of God which makes possible his Christian response in love and his loving service of God and his fellowmen.

Every church worthy of the name is much more than a social fellowship or a moralistic society--it is a fellowship of Christians who have decided and committed themselves. If our churches are to be vital and dynamic in any Christian sense, they must first be distinctively Christian. It may be that the requirements for full membership in a church should include the completion of a minimum study program in addition to a confession of faith. Robert W. Spike suggests that "no one ought to enter into church membership (either by confession of faith or transfer of letter) without adequate orientation and study."⁴⁰ He

⁴⁰Spike, p. 19.

cautions that "this does not equate regenerate church membership with adequate information about Christianity . . ." but thinks that ". . . it is one essential ingredient, particularly in a time of such general illiteracy about the essentials of the gospel."⁴¹ Spike also cautions that the purpose of study requirements in a church is not to keep people out of the church, but ". . . to provide hungry people with the full meat of the gospel, to spread before them the rich sustenance that is the historic Christian faith, so that they may be filled in their whole being."⁴² Such a study program would be particularly well adapted to the needs of adolescents, preferably before college age, when they could delve into the origins and meanings of the Bible and Christianity. It might be better for confirmation or baptism to come after some more adequate and well-rounded study program which leads the young person into consideration of the vital issues of life and into confrontation by the call of God to love and serve Him and all men in Christian love. Older people considering membership in the church might also engage in some such systematic and well-rounded study program which enables them to see the Christian call and message in depth and perspective. Then there would be much less likelihood

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., p. 20.

of people becoming members of the church primarily for social reasons. Such a study program might discourage some from becoming members of a church, but it is not likely to discourage very many from becoming Christian. Furthermore, it should have the real possibility of calling people to a much fuller Christian life and commitment. Such people under God are the vital leaders and Christian witnesses in any vital Christian church.

There is also great need for adult education which is adapted to the needs of adults and challenges them to continued growth and service. William Clayton Bower, Professor Emeritus of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, refers to the thinking of ". . . some educational philosophers and practitioners . . . that the strategic point at which to approach education is at the adult level, without neglecting in the slightest degree the education of the young."⁴³ He quotes from one pastor who has become convinced that adult religious education is as important as the religious education of children and youth because adults determine the kind of environment in which the children and youth must live. D. Campbell Wyckoff remarks that we treat the Bible ". . . as if it were a children's book," although it ". . . is primarily a book by and for adults."⁴⁴ The result, as Wyckoff sees it, is that "we

⁴³William Clayton Bower, "Protestant Religious Education," Part I of "Religious Education--Protestant, Catholic and Jewish, A Symposium," Religious Education, XLVIII (Sept.-Oct., 1953), 299.

⁴⁴Wyckoff, p. 61.

fail to give our children . . . appreciation of it [the Bible] as a book that they must grow up to rather than a book that they may master during childhood, and then like most of the adults in their environment virtually ignore during adulthood."⁴⁵ Spike calls attention to the need for "the continuous opening up of the gospel to the members of the church in ways that are appropriate . . ." as ". . . one of the major tasks of the church program."⁴⁶ He notes that many adults in our churches never come together except for the regular Sunday morning service or for some board or business meeting connected with administrative matters. He replies to the complaint ". . . that we do not give new church members enough things to do to keep them interested" by saying that "the partial truth in this observation . . . is overridden by the fact that we never give them any opportunity to discuss the central meaning of the faith they have espoused in a formal setting."⁴⁷ There is surely much truth in these remarks, and a revitalized program of Christian education should be a great help in developing a Christian fellowship of devotion and vitality. This Christian education should include the frank facing of political, social, economic, international--in fact, all

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Spike, p. 59.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 60.

problems--in the light of the Christian Gospel and the will of God for our lives. There is peace and security in the Christian's confidence in God, but there is also Christian responsibility with work to do.

As we provide a vital program of Christian education which helps people be transformed by the power and love of God, we lay the foundation for providing the needed sponsors and leaders of the work of the Church. Blanche Carrier observes that "the accounts given of the Twelve Great Churches of America seem to have in common the fact that each keeps everybody busy in the fellowship of the Church and in a program of personal evangelism."⁴⁸ This is important, for as people have a part in the work of a church it becomes much more their church because they have become a part of it and it has become a part of them. Then they belong. We should so organize our services of worship and study that the people of the congregation take active part in them and actually belong. This becomes the basis of the Christian community of faith which upholds each of its members in love and compassion. This the nonauthoritarian church can do as well as the authoritarian. In fact, there can be greater understanding as the rights of honest difference of conviction are recognized and transcended in Christian love.

Finally, let us not be afraid to make our Christian faith challenging. Youth, especially, respond to the

⁴⁸Carrier, p. 171.

challenge of difficult tasks that need doing. Let us challenge them to the highest dedication of Christian life and commitment and support them in their endeavors. Let us not undermine their enthusiasm and vision, but let us work with them for their good and ours to the glory of God and the salvation of men. Let us think with them rather than demanding they think exactly the same as we, and in the process both they and we can grow in understanding and wisdom and can work as fellow Christians. Let us live and lead in the spirit which we commend to others. Let us be our best Christian selves and point men on to Christ and God. Let us present the Christian Gospel fairly and boldly and command it to others by the quality of our lives, but let us do so with that respect for the integrity of others which recognizes their right and responsibility to respond to the call of God and His love as they are able and feel in their own consciences they must. By our fruits we are known.

EPILOGUE

We stand at a crossroads in Christian history, chastened by two world-wide wars fought to prevent dictatorial control of the world. Yet there is talk of a "flight from freedom" in the very countries freed from dictatorship. It may be that religious leaders have contributed to the problem by an authoritarianism of their own which has not been conducive to the development of free and responsible persons capable of democratic citizenship and leadership in State as well as Church.

It is the thesis of this writer that the denial of the freedom of both inquiry and conclusion and the dogmatic assertion of what another person must believe about God, man, and life is a denial of the essential freedom of choice which God has given to man.

As a result of the comparison of the various claimed authorities and claims to authority it appears that, although the Creator has the final authority over those he has created, each human person has the responsibility to choose what he thinks is worthy of authority over him and deserving of his loyalty. Further, it appears that God has not delegated His absolute authority to any human person but requires that the primary relationship of every person be direct to Him. Choice seems to be inescapable and it stimulates creative

growth in the human person. Man has been given no sure guide to truth and life and therefore must evaluate and understand his experiences as he seeks to understand life, its meaning and requirements. A man can utilize knowledge of the experiences of others and their thinking, but he must evaluate and choose for himself because of the radical and sincere differences of opinion on many of the important issues in life.

The necessity of freedom of inquiry and conclusion must be recognized in religion. Therefore, although individuals may learn much from the experiences and thinking of others, each individual must decide according to his own best judgment what he thinks is true and what he should do. He may decide to accept the counsel of others, like a medical doctor or a Christian minister, but the choice even to do this is the choice of the individual. Although individuals are limited in their knowledge and understanding by their finiteness, their limited experiences and the time and society in which they are born, the individual nevertheless is dependent upon experience, his own first-hand experiences, and his knowledge of the experiences and thinking of others. Therefore, the wise and prudent in Christian education will help provide the best possible opportunities for the experiences which will be conducive to growth in the image of God and the understanding and acceptance of His authority. With the present knowledge of man, society, the Bible, and Church history, great opportunities and responsibilities for Christian education are before us.

The results of Biblical scholarship and research into Church history and doctrine make possible a fuller understanding of the Christian Gospel than ever before. We have the opportunity to help men use their freedom to grow in the image of God, into maturity of faith and life. We must provide the study and fellowship experiences which at least encourage and make it possible for interested individuals to gain the basis for intelligent judgment and religious growth.

The temptation to be authoritarian and to try to take the responsibility for the decisions of others is ever before us. But we must allow others their God-given freedom to err, while at the same time trying to help them and ourselves to see God's truth more clearly and respond to Him more completely. We must respect the freedom of everyone to accept or reject God's love and His will. Our task is to help men learn by experience how to think responsibly and recognize the call of God and His will. We should invite our adolescents and adults to engage in first-hand study of the Bible, and we should respect their questions about it and its meanings. We should help them become acquainted with the best possible information in order that they can gain answers to their questions. We should do the same with questions of Church history, Christian doctrine, and the problems of present-day living. Much in modern life needs to be redeemed and redirected, but this can only happen as men become responsible, thinking, religious individuals who are free and able to think

for themselves as they feel called by God. It is a part of the work of Christian education to help make this free decision of faith possible, but it can only be done as people are taught with freedom for faith under the authority of God as their experience makes possible.

The Reformation which was begun in the sixteenth century must be continued in every age. Its principles may be lost again, as much was lost then. Men may recoil from the responsibilities of freedom and refuse to utilize it, but that is both their responsibility and opportunity. It is my faith that, given the opportunity in freedom, the average adolescent and adult will welcome the free-inquiry study of the Bible and Church history and doctrine, and that he will grow into greater Christian maturity because of it. Because of early conditioning and feelings of insecurity, some may refuse this opportunity, but many can be reached and helped only in freedom. We need to train our ministers and our teachers to preach and teach the Christian faith with freedom in order that each person may be confronted by the call of God to newness and fullness of life and have the opportunity to respond with love and commitment to the authority of God. Thus may God be glorified and enjoyed forever. May the Reformation continue.

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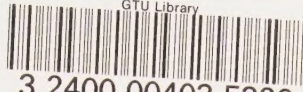
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